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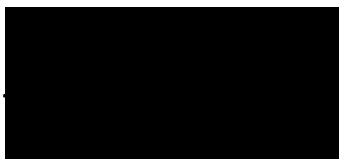
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SHAPING THE 'COMMUNITY': HINDU NATIONALIST IMAGINATION  
IN GUJARAT, 1880-1950  
BEATRIZ MARTINEZ SAAVEDRA

Submitted in part fulfilment for the  
degree in PhD in History at the  
University of Warwick  
Department of History

March 2013

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Last but not least, I am in debt with Javier Buenrostro for his caring support and encouragement in many respects were fundamental for the undertaking and the completion of this project.

## DECLARATION

This thesis is all my own work and has not previously been submitted for a degree to any other university. However some of the issues concerned here were explored in the article ‘Hindúes, Musulmanes y Cristianos: historia de colaboración y violencia en Gujarat’ published in *Istor, Revista de Historia Internacional*, 11:42, 2010.



## ABSTRACT

The concern of this research is the nature of the Hindu nationalist ideology in the western Indian state of Gujarat from 1880 to 1950 since this period is crucial in forging a relationship between Hindu and Muslim communities based on mutual suspicion. The attempt is to shed light on the way a fundamentalist ideology is configured in increasingly exclusivist terms whereby minorities in the subcontinent were gradually granted a marginal citizenship subordinated to a Hindu cultural mainstream.

The deconstruction of the nationalistic discourses of some representative individual figures and groups -the Arya Samaj, the Hindu Mahasabha, K.M. Munshi and Vallabhbhai Patel- allowed unravelling a trajectory of this ideology identifying its major fluctuations. The focus on Gujarati nationalism of Hindu tradition as opposed to a rather exceptional Gandhian nationalism and its commitment to non-violence made possible to explain the current political culture in India nowadays that inherited the legacy of the agitational politics of those years.

Along with the historiographical analysis of these discourses, the research explores the mobilizational strategies accompanying the ideological dimension. The political campaigns of these actors were fundamental in spreading a communal consciousness that enabled a history of perennial confrontation between Hindus and Muslims, an aspect whose origin can be traced in the colonial historiography on India.

In this sense, the research aims not only at being a contribution to the academic debate on the formation of a national consciousness in Gujarat, but also attempts to elucidate the motivations behind communal violence grounded on the circulation of stereotypes and their exploitation. The study contributes to the understanding of contemporary violence as a result of a gradual communalization of politics and daily life that imbibes from the distortion of the historical paradigms that by the end of the nineteenth century still coped with multiculturalism.

## ABBREVIATIONS

BL (L)	British Library, London
BRO (VG)	Baroda Records Office, Vadodara, Gujarat
CD	Confidential Documents
CWSVP	<i>The Collected Works of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel</i>
NMML (D)	Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Delhi
HDSB	Home Department Special Branch
HPOPD	Huzur Political Office, Political Department
HPORD	Huzur Political Office, Revenue Department
MSA (B)	Maharashtra State Archive, Bombay
NAI (D)	National Archives of India, Delhi
OIOC	Oriental and India Office Collections
WISARCI	Western India States Agency Records dealing with Communal Incidents

# Shaping the ‘community’: Hindu nationalist Imagination in Gujarat 1880-1950

## Introduction

In India, the ‘national’ community’ has always been envisaged in a variety of ways.

Shaped by its response to British colonialism, nationalism developed a range of ideological trajectories, whether loyalist, reformist or liberal, counter-cultural and aggressively assertive, revolutionary or socialist, pan-Hindu or pan-Islamic, or, indeed, an ever-shifting blend of several of these tendencies. This created many tensions within the movement.

The current research will explore the nature and development of one of these tendencies – that of Hindu nationalism – in the context of the western Indian region of Gujarat from the final quarter of the nineteenth century up until the mid-twentieth century. As in other parts of India, the development of a new national identity went hand-in-hand with the forging of a new regional self-hood. In the case of Gujarat, this acquired an increasingly Hindu character. In recent years, Gujarat has become notorious for a particularly aggressive form of Hindu governance, and the present research seeks to elucidate something of the pre-history of this process. It has been almost a commonplace to express surprise that such a politics should have arisen from Gandhi’s own homeland.<sup>1</sup> Our argument here is that the lineages of this communal politics can be traced back to the late nineteenth century, and that such a politics co-existed throughout the period of anti-colonial nationalism in Gujarat, including during the period of Gandhi’s ascendancy. The

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<sup>1</sup> Many statements have been made to this effect in recent years. For example, Girish Patel, ‘Narendra Modi’s One-Day Cricket: What and Why?’ *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37: 48 (2002), p.4827, where it is stated, rhetorically: ‘Why the macabre dance by the killers of the Mahatma Gandhi in the land of Gandhi himself? Also, Howard Spodek, ‘From Gandhi to Violence: Ahmedabad’s 1985 Riots in Historical Perspective. *Modern Asian Studies*, 23:4 (1989), p. 766; Howard Spodek, ‘In the Hindutva Laboratory: Pogroms and Politics in Gujarat, 2002’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 44: 2 (2010), pp.367-68.

attention in the historical literature to Gandhian nationalism in Gujarat has tended to obscure this fact.

The case of Gujarat is distinctive inasmuch as Hindu nationalism developed there very much in the shade of Gandhian nationalism, with its notions of communitarian peaceful coexistence and equal rights for all the communities. The strong presence of Gandhian nationalism subsumed the diversified expressions of Hindu nationalism but it did not altogether hinder the latter from causing increasing communal alienation.<sup>2</sup> In time, as Gandhi's influence faded, they became more influential. One concern of this thesis is to explore how the followers of Gandhi were able to come to terms with two ostensibly antagonistic ideologies, Hindu and Gandhian nationalism.<sup>3</sup> William Gould has pointed out in the context of the United Provinces how the diverse and often chaotic nature of the Indian political experience in the late colonial period 'threw up a huge diversity of political voices, which movements like the Congress were obliged to accommodate'.<sup>4</sup> In the case of Gujarat, prominent actors very close to Gandhi such as Vallabhbhai Patel or K.M. Munshi showed different facets in their nationalist careers but at the end, their commitment to Gandhian *ahimsa* or non-violence as well as their attitude towards Muslim overlapped with the values of a recalcitrant Hindu nationalism that marginalized non-Hindu groups, particularly Muslims.

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<sup>2</sup> Douglas Haynes brings out well how Hindu nationalism grew in Gujarat in direct proportion to the decline of Gandhi's influence. See *Rhetoric and Ritual. The Shaping of a Public Culture in Surat City, 1852-1928* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> Much has been said about the Hindu dimension of Gandhi's nationalism; however it has to be considered that his 'Hinduness' was mainly a contextual one. William Gould has noticed how despite their attempts to act in secular ways, the mind-sets of Congress supporters were often shaped by their cultural or contextual backgrounds in Hinduism, so that they became alienated from non-Hindus even when not intending to be. This is what Gould calls the 'illocutionary force', meaning the unintended meanings grasped by a particular audience. See William Gould, 'Congress Radicals and Hindu Militancy: Sampurnanand and Purushottam Das Tandon in the Politics of the United Provinces, 1930-1947', *Modern South Asian Studies*, 36(2002), p. 623.

<sup>4</sup> William Gould, *Hindu Nationalism and the Language of politics in Late Colonial India* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 34.

Exploring a given ideology in a social context is an intricate task, for it will be expressed in many different ways by various participants. That is why ‘studies of individual agency are crucial in the face of a theoretical literature that all too often describes nationalisms in terms of unspecified actors.’<sup>5</sup> In this sense, the exploration of Hindu nationalism in Gujarat will be carried out by focusing on several of its representatives who from different backgrounds – such as literature, history, politics, and religion – contributed to shape a Hindu image as the mainstream national and regional identity either through their activism or through ideological constructions both in a conscious or unintended way.

The aim is, thus, to deconstruct a spectrum of the nationalist discourses of some representative individual figures and groups of Hindu nationalism, in order to explore their premises in articulating a narrative of the symbolic elaboration of nation which has indubitable repercussions in the political culture of Indian society nowadays. This symbolic elaboration has been a constant object of political capitalization, resulting in an effective mobilization of certain social sectors against a supposed antagonistic community. The emphasis will be on a discursive or argumentative dimension of this phenomenon and on the way it intertwined with the actual political mobilisation of various social groups. My aim in exploring the ideological expressions of Hindu nationalism will be to achieve a better understanding of the dynamics of confrontation among the different communities that make up Indian society, since this ideology and the mental representations it poses have been re-elaborated and constantly utilized to justify and explain the communal hostilities that have persisted in this region. These outbreaks of violence have been widely

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<sup>5</sup> Gould, ‘Congress Radicals’, p. 621.

studied,<sup>6</sup> however, there is no study which traces a historical trajectory of the Hindu nationalist ideology in Gujarat.

Although there has been a good deal of writing on the nationalist movement in pre-independence Gujarat, the chief focus has been on Gandhian nationalism.<sup>7</sup> It is argued here that the undoubted importance of this form of nationalism has served to mask the existence of an alternative tradition that defined itself in more stridently Hindu terms. This tendency also had little regard for Gandhian nonviolence. Once we are aware of this, the highly communal and often violent form that politics has assumed in Gujarat in recent years comes less as a surprise; being built as it has been on longstanding nationalistic tropes in the region. Because of our present focus, relatively little will be said about what we may label as orthodox Gandhian nationalism in Gujarat, or Gandhi's views on the communal question, which have already been explored by historians.<sup>8</sup> Attention will however be given to those who, while claiming to follow Gandhi, at the same time either acted or reasoned in ways that violated Gandhi's well-known commitment to promoting religious tolerance and co-existence.

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<sup>6</sup> Rowena Robinson has carried out an ethnographical study of today's violence in Gujarat, *Tremors of violence: Muslim survivors of ethnic strife in western India* (Delhi, 2005) and Martha C. Nussbaum also refers to Gujarat 2002 in *The clash within: democracy, religious violence, and India's future* (Cambridge, 2007). The book is not wholly focused on Gujarat but some chapters explore the topic and one of her main achievements is her interviews with leaders of the Hindu right that bring out their ideological positions in their own voices. Other works include: Dipankar Gupta, *Justice Before Reconciliation. Negotiating a 'New Normal' in Post-Riot Mumbai and Ahmedabad* (New Delhi, 2011); Ali Ashgar Engineer, *The Gujarat Carnage* (New Delhi, 2003); Siddharth Varadarajan, *Gujarat: the making of a tragedy* (New Delhi, 2002); *Gujarat 2002: untold and re-told stories of Hindutva lab* (Delhi, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> For instance, Ghanshyam Shah, 'Traditional society and political mobilization: the experience of Bardoli Satyagraha (1920-1928)', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 8 (1974), pp. 89-107; David Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat. Kheda District 1917-1934* (Delhi, 1981); David Hardiman, 'The Quit India Movement in Gujarat', in Gyanendra Pandey (ed.), *The Indian Nation in 1942* (Calcutta, 1988); Thomas Weber, *On the Salt March: The Historiography of Gandhi's March to Dandi*, (Delhi, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> For example, David Hardiman, *Gandhi in His Time and Ours: The Global Legacy of His Ideas* (London, 2003), pp. 156-197 and Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition. Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 132-146.

These considerations lead us to problematize nationalism as an analytical category in order to clarify in what sense I will be utilizing the notion through this research. As Benedict Anderson has explored in his influential work, nationalism embodies a process of imagining a given community.<sup>9</sup> There are however many possible imaginative trajectories. In the configurative process of community identification, the notion that communal rioting was an endemic aspect of Indian society, past and present, can be seen as a form of colonial epistemology.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, from the 1920's onwards, the colonial administration produced exhaustive lists of riots occurring in different parts of India that served to reinforce the notion that communal strife was a defining feature of Indian society.<sup>11</sup> The mind-sets of Gujarati intellectuals were influenced by this, and many of their writings in the nineteenth century started to reflect the assimilation of the idea of a perennial confrontation between Hindus and Muslims. This assimilation is clear, as we shall see, not only in the most recalcitrant Hindu advocates but also in well-known Gandhian nationalists who in a minor degree also referred and accepted a history of communal conflict. Even though they made a distinction between nationalism and communalism, the premise of communal confrontation was rather taken for granted. Thus we shall explore throughout this research how the assimilation of this notion affected Gujarat's Hindu nationalism(s). In the light of this, if we are to establish a typology of nationalism in the context of the Indian subcontinent there are two different kinds of nationalism closely related – and at times overlapping – which some scholars have already pointed out, that is, anti-colonial nationalism and religious nationalism. The first one focuses on the freedom struggle against colonial rule, while the

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<sup>9</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the origin and spread of Nationalism* (London, New York, 1991), pp. 6-7.

<sup>10</sup> Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (New Delhi, 1990), p. 23.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

latter claims a national identity with a Hindu dimension that it is opposed by a cultural other which posed a threat to cultural integrity.<sup>12</sup> In addition, Aloysius draws attention to the fact that nationalism in the context of colonial India has tended to be seen mainly in terms of pan-Indianism and anti-imperialism as voiced predominantly by the Indian middle classes. This scheme marginalises other groups such as Muslims, lower-caste Hindus, dalits and tribal groups.<sup>13</sup> He argues that there is an important divide between cultural and political nationalism. The former is related to dominant groups in society and is delimited by three central issues: the belief in the integrity, unity and superiority of one's culture; that such a culture is the legitimate receptacle of collective power; and that this 'sanctified' culture is the normative model of nation. It is a more exclusive and normative expression of nationalism.

Conversely, political nationalism would be defined by an attempt at social democratization and broader participation. The ideology of this kind of nationalism is delimited by an aspiration for socio-political equality and is related to subaltern groups that look for new forms of social relationships and demand a more active presence in the public sphere.<sup>14</sup> Often, indeed, the desires and demands of the masses were in tension with that of the middle classes.<sup>15</sup>

The binomials of nationalism we have referred are not mutually exclusive, for while religious and cultural nationalism are generally equivalent, anti-colonial and political

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<sup>12</sup> See Romila Thapar, *Somanatha: The Many Voices of a History*, (New Delhi, 2004). In addition, it is important to note that religious nationalism and communalism are often depicted as antagonistic forces, despite the fact that they largely co-existed in practice. See Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*, and also, Peter Van der Veer, *Religious Nationalisms: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Berkeley, 1994).

<sup>13</sup> G. Aloysius, *Nationalism without a Nation in India* (New Delhi, 1997), p. 126.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>15</sup> David Hardiman and Ghanshyam Shah, for instance, have studied subaltern participation in the satyagrahas in Gujarat showing how these sectors had their own agendas not always coinciding with the nationalist leaders' plans. See *Peasant Nationalist of Gujarat* and 'Traditional Society', respectively.



nationalism did not necessarily correspond, though they could overlap. This study will be mainly concerned with cultural or religious nationalism, the margins of which are delimited by an idea of Hinduism as the foundation of Indian culture, not only as the national religion but as communitarian expression pervading all the different spheres of life. In this, Hinduism is taken to be a standardized creed. We shall however see that in practice Hindu nationalism was not monolithic, since there were many nuances and differences in the way it was expressed by its several representative figures.

### Research Questions

This research examines a broad spectrum of Hindu elaborations of national identity. This includes Gujarati intellectuals at the end of nineteenth century, the Arya Samaj, the ideology and influence of the Maharashtrian nationalist trend, and the Gandhian nationalists K.M. Munshi and Vallabhbhai Patel. All of these endorse a Hindu image to the detriment of a Christian or Muslim identity but in varying degrees and terms. This *intelligentsia* formulated an idea of a glorious regional past (in parallel with the Indian past) which was disrupted by foreign invaders. The Arya Samaj, for instance, embodied a traditionalism encouraged through an idea of returning to an original, non-corrupted form of Hinduism based on the *Vedas*. Concomitant with their thought the sect carried out a ‘Hinduisation’ process<sup>16</sup> through the ritual of *shuddhi* to convert back groups that were supposedly forced to convert to other faiths mainly, Christianity and Islam, and which were claimed to be originally Hindu.

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<sup>16</sup> Yoginder Sikand, and M. Katju, ‘Mass Conversions to Hinduism among Indian Muslims’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 20, (1994), pp. 2214-2219.

In Gujarat, an extremist trend came from Bengal and Maharashtra, where strong and sometimes violent protests were unleashed by the partition of Bengal in 1905. These influences made Gujarat into a centre for the development of a physical culture movement with supposedly defensive purposes.<sup>17</sup> The influence of the Hindu Mahasabha from Maharashtra was also an important factor in the development of cultural nationalism in Gujarat as well as in the increasing hostilities between social sectors of different religious affiliations. This organization promoted Hindu unity to face what was considered an increasing threat by Muslims in the early 1920's.<sup>18</sup>

For his part, Vallabhbhai Patel can also be seen in the light of a nationalist framework. Nevertheless, his is probably a more subtle cultural nationalism, but his participation in nationalistic campaigns unravelled his visualization of a Hindu nation, and his discourse is full of Hindu imagery with the use of a quite specific kind of vocabulary of *dharma*, *maya*, god or sin consciously articulated to mobilize the peasantry that may have alienated Muslims.<sup>19</sup> His political stance became less nuanced and more clearly communal when dealing with the accession of the Indian states.

As for K. M. Munshi, a multifaceted Gujarati lawyer and writer whose ideology will be explored in chapters six and seven, he also endorsed a scheme of a national Hindu culture although his discourse was not always quite clear concerning Muslims. His stance oscillates between the belief of a peaceful coexistence of Muslims and Hindus and the notion of a Hindu culture overturned historically by Islam. There is some tension in his

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<sup>17</sup> Nagindas Sanghavi, *Gujarat, A Political Analysis*, (Surat, 1996), p. 119.

<sup>18</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot shows how the national articulated identity alluded to a figure of the 'other' which was considered a permanent threat. See *Les nationalistes hindous: idéologie, implantation et mobilisation des années 1920 aux années 1990*, (Paris, 1993), p. 24.

<sup>19</sup> Ghanshyam Shah, 'Traditional society', p. 103.

thought but at the end there is the certainty of the prominent status of Hindu culture both in Gujarat and India.

Some of the relevant questions that are raised include: how is nationalist thought constructed in the state of Gujarat? How is nationalist thought related to a regional identity? What are the colonial premises shaping Hindu nationalism? Is the colonial essentialism of perennial Hindu-Muslim confrontations an operative notion in the nationalist ideology? Is the Hindu discourse mainly a derivative discourse from the colonialist one? What other sources and traditions underpin the reaction to the colonial critique?

It is also worth inquiring about the legacy of such nationalist representations for the current violence in the state. What was the social impact of Arya Samaj's activism? What influence did the Maharashtrian extremist trend have in Gujarat? How did K.M. Munshi shape his nationalist ideology? In what way did Vallabhbhai Patel express his nationalism? How did nationalist rhetoric articulate an image of the "antagonistic" community? Answering these questions will help to elucidate the process that led to the consolidation of this ideology in the social imagination, an ideology that seems to encourage people to mobilize against a hypothetical hostile community in an increasingly organized way.

These representations, in general terms, share the conviction of a Hindu India that, in lesser or broader degree, must prevail over the cultural forms of religious minorities. Moreover, they support the notion of the splendour of an Aryan/Hindu culture whose greatness is contrasted with a pejorative misconception of the 'other' depicted as a permanent menace to Hindu culture. This idea has unfortunately expanded and solidified over time, confirming that 'representationality is crucial for communal mobilization'.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Pradip Kumar Datta, *Carving blocs: communal ideology in early twentieth-century Bengal*, (New Delhi, 1999), p. 19.

Hence exploring the several Hindu nationalist expressions means exploring the tensions the process of identity articulation generates when there are repetitive attempts to impose the cultural mainstream through the shaping of the other's image in quite negative and ominous terms.

This way, the research aspires not only at being a contribution to the academic debate on the formation of national consciousness in Gujarat in a crucial period, but also attempts to throw light on the motivations behind violence based on the circulation of stereotypes, portrayals and argumentative formations which brand communities as conflictive, unreliable, alien or fundamentalist. It is my hope that this approach will help in a better understanding of the internal logic of Hindu nationalism and its enduring effect on Indian society.

## Literature Review

In recent times the studies on Hindu nationalism at the all-India level have been prolific. The starting date can go back to the 1990s, a turbulent period that witnessed the most effervescent point of Hindu right activism together with a secular crisis of the state. These aspects brought several changes in the political culture, involving essentially, a marked increase in people's participation in political campaigns under the banner of Hinduism led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a Hindu right party gaining momentum first in northern India. A series of historical works focused on this theme have been carried out since then.<sup>21</sup> They explore how historical narratives are articulated and capitalized by politicians for electoral reasons by a manipulation of national symbols and people's beliefs.

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<sup>21</sup> Particularly influential have been Peter Van der Veer, *Religious nationalism* and Thomas Blom Hansen, *The saffron wave: democracy and Hindu nationalism in modern India* (Princeton, 1999).

In the case of Gujarat, the emergence and growth of nationalism has been explored in a regional context by a number of scholars. Gujarat is one of the areas explored by Sudhir Chandra, in a study titled *The Oppressive Present*. He examines literary texts in Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati and Marathi, showing how they shed light on the dominant consciousness in late nineteenth century in India and its interplay with colonial premises. He shows how the British claim for cultural superiority was contested by the Indian *intelligentsia*, while at the same time they constructed a particular stereotype of ‘the Muslim’, with Hindu culture being considered superior to that of Islam.<sup>22</sup> Following the same line, Riho Isaka undertook the task of analysing the literary and historical discourses of Gujarati regional intellectuals to explore their self-consciousness in relation to the Indian nation *vis à vis* the groups considered ‘exogenous’ to India.<sup>23</sup> The present work builds on the insights of Chandra and Isaka, taking the analysis into the twentieth century.

Douglas Haynes in his *Rhetoric and Ritual* examines the way in which the elites of Surat City in South Gujarat appropriated colonial discourses in order to shape a public culture that resulted in a profound transformation of the society of the city. He explores how Gujaratis struggled for power when under colonial domination, and the rise of a new Gandhian politics, and its weakening after 1923 against a background of rising communal tensions in Surat as different communities divided into discrete political blocks.<sup>24</sup> In the present thesis I shall explore how Gandhian nationalism and Hindu nationalism braided

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<sup>22</sup> See Sudir Chandra, *The Oppressive Present Literature and Social Consciousness in Colonial India*, (New Delhi, 1992) and also by Sudir Chandra, ‘Regional Consciousness in 19<sup>th</sup> Century India: A Preliminary Note’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 17, (1982), pp. 1278-1285.

<sup>23</sup> Riho Isaka, ‘Gujarati intellectuals and history writing in the Colonial Period’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37, (2002), pp. 4867-4872 and ‘Gujarati Elites and the Construction of a Regional Identity in the Late Nineteenth Century’ in Crispin Bates, (ed), *Beyond Representation: Colonial and Postcolonial Constructions of Indian Identity* (New Delhi, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> Douglas Haynes, *Rhetoric and Ritual*.

constantly in Gujarat throughout the early twentieth century, with many Gandhians also subscribing to Hindu nationalist beliefs.

Other scholars have explored in detail certain representative episodes of the nationalist movement in Gujarat. Ghanshyam Shah, for instance, has studied the Bardoli *satyagraha* of 1928. He highlights the channels whereby peasants mobilized during this campaign and the strategies of participation from persuasion to coercion. His study explores a language of religiosity deliberately used by Vallabhbhai Patel and Kunvarji Mehta, the leaders of this campaign, in order to appeal to ordinary people, taking for granted that their religiosity provided the best means for this.<sup>25</sup> The current study will elaborate further on Vallabhbhai Patel's role in spreading cultural nationalist notions and his understanding at different junctures of the place of Muslims in Indian society.

In the same framework of nationalism as anti-colonial struggle, David Hardiman's *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat* examines the nature of peasant mobilization in Kheda in the first decades of twentieth century. His work is a combination of detailed examination on the mobilizational aspect of nationalism and the ideological one. In this sense, the study's contribution lies fundamentally in showing that peasant movements of this period were not articulated by the elites but by the actual members of peasant communities who had their own agendas. In addition, on the ideological aspect, his work provides several research lines to be undertaken, for instance, the examination of Arya Samaj activism specifically in Gujarat.<sup>26</sup> In the present research we shall focus on investigating the Samaj's campaigning in Gujarat, its impact and mainly how it worked jointly with the Hindu Mahasabha and some members of the Congress. The campaigns of the Arya Samaj and Hindu Mahasabha

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<sup>25</sup> Ghanshyam Shah, 'Traditional society'.

<sup>26</sup> David Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat*.

to establish Hindu organisations that often focused on the development of physical culture produced an explosive atmosphere that culminated in episodes of inter-communal violence. These outbreaks will be examined in the thesis.

Looking to regional studies that focus on regions other than Gujarat, we find that William Gould elucidates how Hindu nationalism was a multi-faceted ideology that cannot be clearly associated with specific Hindu nationalist groups such as the Arya Samaj or the Hindu Mahasabha but rather cut across political divides. In his *Hindu Nationalism and the Language of Politics in Late Colonial India*<sup>27</sup> he has shown how in the case of the United Provinces the idea of a Hindu nation transcended the sphere of conservative or orthodox organizations to permeate Congress politics in a way that drew in even supposedly ‘secular’ Congressmen. He shows the way in which Congressmen who ostensibly supported ‘the universal, multireligious aspect of nation hood’<sup>28</sup>, often embraced much more limited notions of ‘the nation’ in which Hinduism was taken as a marker of ‘Indianness’, with its antithesis being increasingly that of Islam from the 1920s onwards. By the 1930s and 1940s such a mentality had become very widespread in UP, being deployed sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously in a way that that increasingly alienated non-Hindus.<sup>29</sup>

Also on UP, Gyanendra Pandey has explored how the Congress operated along religious lines, for instance, participating in Hindu fairs and festivals in a way that created a Hindu bias for the organisation.<sup>30</sup> All of this helped to reinforce a communal consciousness. The process was augmented by the colonial state, with its encouragement

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<sup>27</sup> William Gould, *Hindu Nationalism*.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>30</sup> Gyanendra Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh, 1926-34. A Study of Imperfect Mobilization*, (New Delhi, 1978) p. 33.

of separatist Muslim bodies.<sup>31</sup> Several top Congress leaders in UP were associated with the Hindu Mahasabha, most notably Madan Mohan Malaviya. This all helped to buttress communal politics, with political organisations adopting communal propaganda as part of their offensive, particularly during elections.<sup>32</sup>

The focus of Gould, and to some extent Pandey, is on the Congress, its Hindu dimension and its relation with Hindu exponents. By contrast, this research considers several advocates of Hindu nationalism, including Congress members, which made advances in different terrains in terms of propagating a Hindu consciousness. Observing this phenomenon in a broader spectrum of expressions will give a more comprehensive elucidation of its influence and permanence in Gujarati society.

Nandini Gooptu has explored the sector of the ‘poor’ and their responses and initiatives to UP Congress politics and also to Hindu nationalist groups which, as mentioned, frequently shared a common agenda.<sup>33</sup> She shows a differentiated response among *shudras* and untouchables to the political campaigns of these political bodies. Like Gould, Gooptu shows how a so-called ‘secular’ organisation like the Congress campaigned alongside Hindu institutions like the Arya Samaj or the Hindu Mahasabha. They even had the same personnel touring the cities to convey nationalist messages that mixed anti-colonial patriotic fervour with antagonism towards Muslims. Gooptu’s focus is, however, on the manner in which subaltern groups became increasingly belligerent, and also developed a culture of physical training while defining their role in the national struggle. But we do not learn much from her study about the way that the message of the Arya Samaj

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid. p. 115.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. p. 118.

<sup>33</sup> Nandini Gooptu, *The Politics of the Urban Poor in Early Twentieth Century India*, (Cambridge, 2001).



and Hindu Mahasabha was received by such groups, and exactly how it promoted a communal consciousness and increasing militancy among them.

Centres for physical training – such as gymnasiums, or *akhadas* – were similarly a focus for political activity in Gujarat. The presence of such institutions frequently exasperated communal tensions in an area. They were often a location for Hindu nationalist activity, but not always, for some ‘secular’ Congress activists also promoted such training. Gooptu has similarly revealed how politically diverse were the *akhadas*.

In her study of the politics that revolved around the temple at Somnath, Romila Thapar has looked in a brief but illuminating way at the figure of K.M. Munshi as an important advocate of Hindu ideology. By examining some of his writings, she has pointed out his conviction that a great Aryan culture of India was undermined by Islam.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, she highlights some of the most influential figures in Munshi’s thought and work. However her examination of Munshi’s writings make no distinction between fictional and non-fictional texts which can be misleading in disentangling the notions of the Gujarati writer relating to Hindu culture and the role Muslims have in it. A study focusing on his fictional works is also required.

Thapar manages to underline well the contradictions in Munshi’s attitudes on Hindu-Muslims relations. This is not the case with Manu Bhagavan, who in his article ‘The Hindutva underground: Hindu nationalism and the Indian National Congress in late colonial and early post-colonial India’ brands Munshi as a communalist from the very

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<sup>34</sup> Thapar, *Somanatha*, p. 181

beginning and fails to bring out the ambiguities in his writing.<sup>35</sup> However his article is helpful in tracing some relevant sources for an analysis of this Gujarati writer.

A most pertinent text for this research is ‘On the Political Culture of Authoritarianism’ by Parita Mukta who accurately underscores the importance of reassessing Vallabhbhai Patel’s and K.M. Munshi’s roles in producing a communal sense that demanded from the Muslim community constant evidence of their loyalty to the Indian/Hindu nation.<sup>36</sup> Mukta details the symbolism of their campaigning in the reconstruction of the Somnath temple, whose previous destruction by Muslims was considered by them as a ‘humiliation’ and ‘shame’ that had to be redressed. This research will elaborate further on this issue showing how the history of the temple at Somnath was understood in increasingly dogmatic ways that linked up with a Hindu nationalist agenda.

Achyut Yagnik and Suchitra Sheth put this history within a much broader history in their book *The Shaping of Modern Gujarat*.<sup>37</sup> The authors examine the conundrum that while Gujarat has always been subject to invasion and rule by people of very different cultures and religions over time, and has been the centre for a massive export trade with the world beyond India, the dominant culture has over time remained deeply conservative. This has been reinforced by two recent edited collections of essays *The Idea of Gujarat* and *Gujarat Beyond Gandhi*.<sup>38</sup> Here the focus is on marginal groups and identities in Gujarati society in a way that seeks to break down the idea that Gujarat had a homogenous culture.

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<sup>35</sup> Manu Bhagavan, ‘The Hindutva underground: Hindu nationalism and the Indian National Congress in late colonial and early post-colonial India’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 13 (2008). pp. 39-48.

<sup>36</sup> Parita Mukta, ‘On the Political Culture of Authoritarianism’, in Ghanshyam Shah, Mario Rutten and Hein Streefkerk (eds), *Development and Deprivation in Gujarat* (New Delhi, Thousand Oaks, 2002).

<sup>37</sup> Achyut Yagnik and Suchitra Sheth, (eds), *The Shaping of Modern Gujarat. Plurality, Hindutva and Beyond* (New Delhi, 2005).

<sup>38</sup> Edward Simpson and Aparna Kapadia (eds), *The Idea of Gujarat. History, Ethnography and Text* (New Delhi, 2010) and Nalin Mehta and Mona G. Mehta (eds), *Gujarat Beyond Gandhi. Identity, Conflict and Society* (New Delhi, 2010).

This is in a context in which the dominant Hindu nationalists of today's Gujarat try to erase such identities, forging in place a homogenous Hindu culture.

There are a number of other studies that do not focus specifically on Gujarat but which discuss issues that are pertinent to the present thesis. John Zavos, *The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in India* focuses on the emergence of this tendency in India as a whole.<sup>39</sup> One of his premises is that cultural reorganization proposed by revivalist movements first, and by nationalist thought later, must be seen in relation to a colonial discourse of organization which inspired the examination of Hinduism by confronting it with other religions in the modern world. This fact allowed Hindu nationalism to emerge as an influential ideology. In this same line but covering a broader scope is Chetan Bhatt's *Hindu nationalism: origins, ideologies, and modern myths* in which the author also traces the colonial role in the construction of a nationalist discourse.<sup>40</sup> The focus here is more on the Orientalists and other Western intellectuals, including those in the tradition of German Romanticism in which there was a high regard for a supposedly universal humanism found in Hindu philosophy. This positive take on Hinduism was later appropriated by Hindu nationalists in their construction of a supposed Aryan identity, as seen in particular with the Arya Samaj. Christophe Jaffrelot, *Les nationalistes hindous* shows the origins and development of Hindu nationalism out of what he defines as the 'external threats' – real or subjective – embodied in colonialism and panislamism.<sup>41</sup> Following Clifford Geertz, he states that nationalist ideology must be seen in the light of modernization since this

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<sup>39</sup> John Zavos, *The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in India* (New Delhi, 2000).

<sup>40</sup> Chetan Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths* (New York, 2001).

<sup>41</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, *Les nationalistes hindous: idéologie, implantation et mobilisation des années 1920 aux années 1990* (Paris, 1993), p.23. There is also the up-dated English version, Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics, 1925 to the 1990's. Strategies of Identity-Building, Implantation and Mobilisation* (London, 1996).

modernizing trend was a source of cultural disorientation. This was countered with a creation of a new ideological structure that was rooted in the idea of cultural revival.

In general terms, these works deal with the more belligerent forms of Hindu nationalism. There is a particular focus on the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), an association promoting a militant Hinduism; the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) which deals with the social aspect of activities carried out by the RSS and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which is the political wing of the group and one of the national parties. Collectively these organizations form the Sangh Parivar or family of Hindu organizations which consider Hindu culture as the foundation of national identity.<sup>42</sup> These groups were not influential in Gujarat during the period studies in this thesis, and can thus be applied only in a broad way when dealing with some of the ideological foundations of Hindu nationalism over the past century and a half that were also relevant in the case of pre-independence Gujarat.

On the other hand, there are a number of works concerning the Arya Samaj, which was important in Gujarat during this period. The works by Zavos, Bhatt, and Jaffrelot include chapters and sections on this organisation. Nevertheless, they study the topic in a quite general way. They refer to Arya Samaj mainly as one of the points of departure of nationalist thought, that is, as an important prelude to a more recalcitrant form of nationalism, as expressed by the Sangh Parivar. There are however more focussed studies of the Arya Samaj. Notable is Kenneth Jones's *Arya Dharm: Hindu consciousness in 19th-century Punjab* that focuses on the impact of Arya Samaj in this specific region.<sup>43</sup> The

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<sup>42</sup>For an overview of these organizations see the introduction to Christophe Jaffrelot (ed.), *Hindu Nationalism. A Reader* (Princeton and Oxford, 2007).

<sup>43</sup> Kenneth W. Jones, *Arya Dharm: Hindu consciousness in 19th-century Punjab* (Berkeley and London, 1976).

current thesis examines the activism of the sect in the particular and different case of Gujarat. Seunarine's *Reconversion to Hinduism through Shuddhi* provides a socio-historical analysis of *shuddhi*, the ceremony of conversion implemented by the Arya Samaj aimed at Muslims and Christians who were claimed to have been originally Hindus. His is an interesting study since it comes from a Christian perspective which considers the work of the Arya Samaj not so much in terms of its fundamentalism but in regard to its social effort to uplift the depressed classes.<sup>44</sup>

The founder of the organization has been object of several analyses and biographies. One of the best is *Dayananda Sarasvati. Essays on His Life and Ideas* by J. T. F. Jordens.<sup>45</sup> This provides a serious and well-balanced study that distances it from most other biographies, which tend to be hagiographical. For all their limitations, the latter are however worthwhile looking at, as they provide an insight into Dayananda's thought and appeal to people. One such study is *Life of Dayanand Saraswati* by the Arya Samajist Har Bilas Sarda.<sup>46</sup> Jordens' *Swami Shraddhananda: His Life and Causes*, which focuses on another important Arya Samaj leader, is also significant.<sup>47</sup>

There are also available articles and essays which study certain aspects of the Arya Samaj. Among the most relevant are those by Yoginder Sikand and M. Katju, 'Mass Conversions to Hinduism among Indian Muslims'; David Hardiman, 'Purifying the nation: The Arya Samaj in Gujarat 1895-1930' and also Kenneth Jones, 'Reconversion to Hinduism, the Shuddhi of the Arya Samaj'.<sup>48</sup> In general terms, they explore the way in

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<sup>44</sup> J. F. Seunarine, *Reconversion to Hinduism through Shuddhi* (Madras, 1977).

<sup>45</sup> J. T. F. Jordens, *Dayananda Sarasvati: essays on his life and ideas* (New Delhi, 1998).

<sup>46</sup> Har Bilas Sarda, *Life of Dayanand Saraswati* (Ajmer, 1968).

<sup>47</sup> J.F.T. Jordens' *Swami Shraddhananda: His Life and Causes* (New Delhi, 1981).

<sup>48</sup> Sikand, Yoginder, 'Arya Shuddhi and Muslim Tabligh: Muslim Reactions to Arya Samaj Proselytization (1923-30), in Robinson, Rowena and Clarke, Sathianathan, *Religious Conversion in India. Modes, Motivations, and Meanings* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003); David Hardiman, 'Purifying the

which the object of conversion gradually moved from Christians to Muslims, in the process exasperating tensions in a way that fed into the agendas of both Hindu and Muslim nationalists.

A final word on the Gujarati sources is required. Since the time available to learn Gujarati to an adequate standard was not sufficient, I relied on the English translations of several texts, mainly in the case of K.M. Munshi's works and some official reports whose translated versions were available in the archive along with the original. On the other hand, the reading of other non-translated Gujarati texts was possible with the help of Arun Vaghela, a reader in History at Gujarat University, and Ishan Bhavsar, a student in the same institution.

## Methodology

There are two main dimensions to the study of Hindu nationalism, on the one hand, its theoretical articulation, and on the other, the political activism that it encouraged. The latter aspect implies not only mobilization as such but also people's understanding of the historical discourse. However in studying one or another dimension there will necessarily be an overlap since both spheres are entangled.

In *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics*, which is particularly useful in establishing a method to approach such a study, Jaffrelot perceives three 'strategies' in the articulation of Hindu nationalism. In this sense, he proposes to examine this ideology by focusing on each strategy. In the first place is the theoretical frame of ethnic nationalism, which refers to the ideological formulations that vindicate the cultural

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Nation: The Arya Samaj in Gujarat 1895-1930', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 44: 41 (2007); Kenneth W. Jones, 'Reconversion to Hinduism, the Shuddhi of the Arya Samaj', in G.A. Oddie, (ed.), *Religion in South Asia*, (London, 1977).

perspectives of the upper classes. This strategy bifurcates, in turn, in processes of stigmatization and emulation of the cultural counterparts.<sup>49</sup> The second strategy has to do with an identity-building process that serves an instrumentalist strategy which consists in ethno-religious mobilization. And finally, there is the strategy of local implantation related to local-level techniques of party building.<sup>50</sup> That is to say, his method consists, first, in unravelling the nationalist ideology, its context of origin and formation in order to explore its later adoption and the process whereby it results in mobilization, to conclude with the appraisal of the role of politicians and political institutions in boosting and capitalizing on this ethno-religious mobilization.

The current research will be conducted by establishing a twofold scheme of analysis that focuses, on the one hand, at the level of ideological formation, and on the other, on the social and political appropriation of this nationalist representation resulting in the mobilization of different social segments. We shall proceed by analyzing a spectrum of primary sources, that is to say, several kinds of works such as essays, novels, histories, speeches, discourses, newspaper cuttings, official reports, gazetteers, censuses and the correspondence of exponents of Hindu nationalist thought. Through a historiographical examination of such documents we shall be able to disentangle the processes by which nationalist discourses were constructed and their subsequent re-elaborations by diverse exponents in the context of a political and social environment that favoured such cultural definitions of national identity.

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<sup>49</sup> In the original French version of this work, Jaffrelot's denomination for this stigmatization-emulation strategy is 'syncrétisme stratégique' (strategic syncretism) which in the revised English version is replaced since it seems to him more relevant for the case of socio-religious reform movements such as the Brahmo Samaj which attempted to evolve a cultural synthesis. See *Les nationalistes hindous*, p. 23.

<sup>50</sup> Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics*, pp. 6-7.

The way that this fed into actual social and political campaign will be elucidated by examining the activities of the Arya Samaj, the Hindu Mahasabha and the nationalist protests led by Vallabhbhai Patel in Gujarat, showing how they helped to popularize such a consciousness among the people. The shape Gujarati identity acquired under their guidance became influential in relationships between religious communities. This will show how representationality is a fundamental element both in self-conception and in creating an attitude towards a cultural other.

This project proposes to scrutinize the history of Hindu nationalism in Gujarat in its social context. A historical analysis will be incomplete if we do not see how history affects the social, that is to say, how long term cultural constructions become embedded in and impact on consciousness and daily life. That is why the research will also explore such ideas were used in mobilising political support beyond the level of the nationalist elites. By doing this I will be able to explore how historical narratives work both as a symbolic elaboration through which a nation is conceived but also how they are understood and decoded by people and what allows its later effective use in political capitalization.

Following the perspectives of the historical schools of *Subaltern Studies* and the History of Mentalities, the idea is to disentangle how ordinary people lived and perceived specific historical notions incorporated in their everyday life. By approaching the phenomenon this way, I hope to be able to grasp a better understanding of its reach and persistence in today's Gujarat and India.

How is Gujarat different?

While many of the processes studied in this thesis find parallels in other parts of India, Gujarat had its own particular history that differentiates it in certain important respects.



The first point to note is that Gujarat was a backwater so far as Indian nationalism was concerned up until the First World War period. Although prominent nationalist, notably Aurobindo Ghose, were based in Gujarat in the early years of the twentieth century, their focus was on mobilisation in other regions – in particular Bengal, Bombay and Maharashtra. It was only with the arrival of Gandhi in Ahmedabad in 1915 that Gujarat shifted to the centre-stage of the movement. Because of this, the identity of the nationalist upsurge in Gujarat was heavily identified with Gandhi and his form of politics. Gandhi forged an alliance with the Khilafatist Muslims in 1920, embracing a friendship with the ‘other’ of Hindu nationalism that was initially opposed by some of his leading followers in Gujarat, such as Vallabhbhai Patel.<sup>51</sup> Even after the alliance with the Khilafatists collapsed, Gandhi fought for good inter-communal relations. This tended to limit the political reach of the Hindu nationalism in Gujarat during the Gandhian era. Gandhi, however, left Ahmedabad in the 1930s, shifting his base to Wardha in Central India. Without his presence, Congress politics in Gujarat became increasingly communalised. Nonetheless, a strong Gandhian ethos continued to prevail in political circles in Gujarat until after 1947; all of which helped check the rise of the Hindu Right until the latter years of the twentieth century.

Another distinct feature of Gujarat was that the Arya Samaj had a somewhat different trajectory there as compared to other parts of India. Dayanand Saraswati, the founder of the organisation, was himself from Gujarat; but in the late nineteenth century his message was not received with any great enthusiasm for the most part in the region. It was only in Baroda State, where the ‘progressive’ ruler, Sayajirao Gaikwad, sought to ameliorate the condition of the untouchables of his state, that Arya Samajists were invited

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<sup>51</sup> Indulal Yagnik, *Atmakatha*, Vol. II (Ahmedabad, 1970), pp.255-6, 259.

from the Punjab to work with this community, in particular providing education for them.<sup>52</sup> The Arya Samaj then enjoyed a relatively brief efflorescence in the region during the first decade and a half of the twentieth century after large numbers of untouchables in central Gujarat were converted to Christianity, in a way that was regarded by many high-caste Hindus as posing a profound threat to the integrity of their society. In general, these new Arya Samajists were also strong nationalists, and when Gandhi returned to India in 1915 they almost all aligned themselves with him and a movement that gave them a new sense of pride in Gujarat. In the process, most of them severed their ties with an institution that Gandhi increasingly distanced himself from, as its intolerant ant-Muslim agenda became increasingly clear over the next decade. The erstwhile Arya Samajists for the most part became strongly committed Gandhians.<sup>53</sup> Whether or not elements of their earlier Hindu nationalism survived is something that we have to determine in the course of this thesis. Here, all that we need to note is that it was relatively muted among those who became firm Gandhians, and in some notable cases – such as that of the prominent Gandhian social worker Ravishankar Maharaj – completely disavowed.

Gujarat also had members of the Hindu Mahasabha, but unlike in UP, where one of the foremost Congress leaders of the province – Madan Mohan Malaviya – was also the leader of the Mahasabha, they were in Gujarat not in the top tier of the Congress. They were, at best, local level figures, such as the activist of Godhra town, Vamanrao Mukadam, and the organiser of a gymnasium in Baroda City, Professor Manekrao. We shall examine these two figures in some detail in this thesis. It may be noted that both were Maharashtrian by origin, making them outsiders in Gujarat. Although they contributed to

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<sup>52</sup> Hardiman, 'Purifying the Nation', p.44.

<sup>53</sup> Hardiman, 'Purifying the Nation', p. 54.

the climate of nationalist opinion in Gujarat, particularly in the late 1920s, they were fairly marginal within the Gujarat Provincial Congress Committee, which was dominated by Vallabhbhai Patel.

As for the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), it had almost no presence in Gujarat before independence in 1947, and indeed for some years after that date. It was badly discredited in Gujarat for many years after 1948, as it was commonly believed to have had a hand in the assassination of Gandhi. Nonetheless, the history of the modern upsurge of communal politics in Gujarat is associated almost entirely with the RSS and its off-shoots. Although the RSS began to run its *shakhas* in Gujarat in the post-independence years, appealing to youths who had little other activity to occupy themselves outside school hours, it only began to make political headway at the time of Indira Gandhi's emergency of 1975-77, when the RSS and its affiliates of the Sangh Parivar led the underground resistance to the Prime Minister and her authoritarian son, Sanjay Gandhi. The election of 1977 brought many RSS *pracharaks* to power, as members of the coalition that made up the Janata Party. This gave them a new respectability and power within the state. The Janata Party however collapsed in 1980, to be replaced by a resurgent Indira Congress in Gujarat under the Chief Minister Madhavsingh Solanki. He pursued a strategy of creating an electoral alliance of the backward castes, dalits, adivasi and Muslims under the slogan of *garibi hatao* (eliminate poverty). The chief opposition now became the Bharatiya Janta Party – the newly-formed electoral vehicle for the Sangh Parivar. This managed gradually to undermine the increasingly-discredited Congress and build support on a pro-Hindu, and anti-Muslim and Christian platform that revolved around issues such as the building of a Ram temple in Ayodhya. The pogrom of Muslims carried out in the cities of Gujarat after the destruction of the Babri Masjid further reinforced this tendency, leading to its formation

of a state government in 1998. This led to immediate attacks on Christian converts, followed four years later in 2002 by one of the most notorious pogroms of Muslims carried out anywhere in post-independence India. Under its new BJP Chief Minister, the RSS *pracharak* Narendra Modi, Gujarat now developed a reputation for being in the vanguard of Hindutva.

In all this, Gujarat has experienced a very particular history that moved according to different timetables to that of Hindu nationalism elsewhere in India. It also had a different quality – being marginalised by the Gandhian movement before 1947, and only much later developing a firm momentum that propelled it to the fore in the affairs of the state. Hindu nationalism was however a tendency that braided itself in complex ways with Gandhian nationalism in Gujarat throughout the period between 1916 and 1947. It also had its earlier incarnations, and it will be the task of this thesis to evaluate the extent and significance of this predisposition in Gujarat between 1880 and 1950.

## Chapter Plan

The thesis is structured into seven chapters dealing with a spectrum of representatives of Hindu nationalist ideology. Although the chapters seem to be dealing with separate case studies they are related because the exponents explored had a clear connexion with each other at different junctures and their task promoting Hindu nationalism had an overall social impact. The cultural nationalist campaigns of the different actors were hardly undertaken in isolation and from the platform of their associates they launched joint campaigns to promote their recalcitrant ideologies.

The research is intended to follow a chronological sequence; however, several of the explored actors overlap in time. This way the order is arranged to show the progression of

the ideological constructs and the way they were implanted in diverse places of Gujarat. Chapter one will examine the main features shaping a Gujarati regional identity mainly through historical and literary discourses at the end of the nineteenth century. We shall particularly focus on the way that Muslims were represented, and the creation of an idea of a glorious Gujarat that was supposedly raided by foreign invaders. This task will be undertaken with the aim of appraising how regional identity and national identity intertwine.

The idea of Hinduism advocated by the Arya Samaj and its cultural constructions will be explored in chapter two to calibrate to what extent Arya Samajist ideology is a point of departure in the history of a more exclusive Hindu nationalism. This chapter also aims at analyzing Arya Samajist activism in Gujarat and its impact in the articulation of a Hindu cultural representation and also in the representationality other communities had of themselves, for instance, Muslim segments that reacted to Arya Samaj with a counter-activism showing themselves aggressive and defensive too.

In chapter three we will analyze Maharashtrian nationalist influences in Gujarat through the presence of relevant figures such as Professor Manekrao and Vamanrao Mukadam, a teacher in Godhra. They belonged to the Hindu Mahasabha, which promoted the idea that Hindus must unite in the face of a supposed Muslim threat. The chapter will also examine the close links that existed between the Mahasabha and the Arya Samaj, and the way that the Congress was linked with both institutions and their intolerant ideologies.

Chapter four will explore the growth of communal tension in Ahmedabad from 1939 to 1941, with conflicts between Hindus and Muslims that were sparked by a dispute over Hindus playing music in their procession before a mosque and the Muslims retaliating, in turn, by slaughtering a cow and distributing its meat among poor people. This led to a

severe communal riot in the city in 1941. By examining this history, we can bring out the way that communal politics was being articulated at the time and evaluate its impact on the political life of Gujarat.

In chapter five we shall concentrate on scrutinizing Vallabhbhai Patel's activity and leadership in the national struggle both in a pragmatic level, with his dynamic participation in campaigns such as Bardoli, which provide him with a national political platform, and also saw him articulating a political discourse that was clearly Hindu in its rhetoric and appeal. Vallabhbhai's soft approach when dealing with Hindu communal organisations underlines some of the limits to the secularism of the Congress under his leadership in Gujarat.

The final chapters, six and seven, seek to unravel Munshi's articulation of a nationalist doctrine in both its regional and national forms. I will examine the way Munshi's idea of nation appealed to an ancient Aryan background as the foundation of both Gujarati and Indian culture. By studying his writings, I hope to be able to explore his ideological interpretations that express his scheme of nation and the place and role that foreign groups have within it.

In chapter seven we will carry out the exploration of Munshi's representations in greater detail but through the mediation of the literary resources which his Gujarati fiction provides. We shall use his novels as a way into understanding better his ideas about Gujarat, the Indian nation and its 'others', and try to measure the way in which this all permeated the social imagination of the people of Gujarat.

## Chapter one

### A History for Gujarat: Persian, colonial and Gujarati accounts of the regional past

The new histories that were created for India, and, by extension, for Gujarat in the nineteenth century emerged out of the process of colonial conquest. They were designed, on the one hand, to allow the new rulers to understand better the territories they now controlled, and, on the other, to establish an ideological hegemony over the Indian people.<sup>1</sup> In doing so, they sought to displace the existing vernacular histories, which they condemned for allowing mythological events and facts to intertwine with historical ones.<sup>2</sup> During the second half of the nineteenth century, Indian writers began to challenge these colonial histories and undertook the task of writing a national history. It was said by Indian authors, that the colonial accounts distorted the real history of India. The process was taken up at both a national and regional level, with the histories of areas such as Bengal or Gujarat being seen as coterminous with the Indian nation.<sup>3</sup> This chapter will focus on the history-writing process in Gujarat which has not been properly studied. It will attempt to show that in creating what was ostensibly their own histories, the regional intelligentsia in fact incorporated certain colonial paradigms – in particular the one that stereotyped Muslims as the destroyers of the glory of Gujarat and India.

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<sup>1</sup> Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997), pp. 158-159

<sup>2</sup> Guha has explored the forms British histories of India took in the colonial period: first, narratives of political histories of large areas; the second one overlapped with the first one, it was a history of a large area and long period as well but underscoring the economic aspect of the land in question. And the third one focused on the relationship of power and property at a local level. See *ibid.*, pp. 160-161.

<sup>3</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments. Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, (Princeton, 1993), p. 76

Although the Gujarati literatures of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries imagined Gujarat as a single entity – namely as a sub-nation within the wider Indian nation, the region lacked political unity at that time, and indeed obtained it only in 1960, thirteen years after the eventual demise of British rule.<sup>4</sup> They held that the region had been united in the distant past, but that this unity had been shattered by foreign invaders of one sort or another. K.M. Munshi located the creation of Gujarat in the Caulukya period of the twelfth century. During this period the Caulukyias extended their control over much of what is modern Gujarat, including Saurashtra and Kachchh.<sup>5</sup> This polity was then destroyed by the conquests of the sultans of Delhi. The region achieved its independence once more in the fifteenth century, this time under the Gujarat sultans, and in particular Mahmud Bigara, who ruled from 1459 to 1511. Starting from his base in central and northern Gujarat, he extended the rule of the sultans to Saurashtra and eastern Gujarat, in the process creating the administrative unit largely as it exists today. Recent scholarship has brought out the way in which many of what are now understood to be the defining features of Gujarat and its identity can be traced back to this period, which lasted up until the Mughal conquest of the mid-sixteenth century. The Gujarati language and its distinctive castes and religious sects all appeared at this time.<sup>6</sup> Vaishnavism, for instance, which has been largely associated with the region's hegemonic mercantile ethos, was not influential during the Caulukya period. On the contrary, it was under the Muslim rule of the sultans of Gujarat that this religious sect

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<sup>4</sup> Edward Simpson, 'The Parable of the Jakhs', in Edward Simpson and Aparna Kapadia, (eds), *The Idea of Gujarat*, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Samira Sheikh, *Forging a region. Sultans, Traders, and Pilgrims in Gujarat 1200-1500*, (New Delhi, 2010), p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.



solidified and expanded.<sup>7</sup> As a matter of fact, the fifteenth-century Gujarat was a wealthy region diversified in religious patronage resulting in a multitude of sects, therefore individuals could experiment in a number of religious practices, frequenting various shrines for particular purposes.<sup>8</sup> The people of Gujarat for the most part enjoyed freedom in their heterogeneous religious practices, which ranged from the Sunni Islam practised by the sultans themselves, to Shia Islam, Sufism, Vaishnavism, Shaivism and Jainism. Conversion was not an aspect in the sultans' agendas;<sup>9</sup> so that religion and politics became largely separated under their rule.<sup>10</sup>

Although Gujarat subsequently lost its political independence, the consciousness of this as a distinct region of India continued being formulated and re-formulated in changing and contested ways. In this chapter we shall start by examining the way that the British constructed their history of Gujarat initially through use of the important eighteenth-century Persian work titled the *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*. We shall then go to see how they extended their sources to the use of Rajput genealogies to construct a more Hindu-centred history. We shall conclude by examining the ways that Gujarati intellectuals reacted to this, in the process constructing their own historical notions about the region.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 83-84.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 130. Although temples were at times destroyed in an aggressive way by the Muslim invaders and conquerors of Gujarat, as elsewhere in India, this was invariably carried out as a means to destroy the political power of rival rulers, rather than as an act of religious intolerance. On this, see Eaton, R. *Essays on Islam and Indian history*, (New Delhi, 2002), Romila Thapar, *Somanatha* and *ibid.*, p. 191. This was the case for the attacks on the temples at Anhilvada Patan, Siddhpur and Somnath, all carried out as the Delhi sultans were establishing their rule over Gujarat. Samira Sheikh, *Forging a Region*, p. 191. Once their authority had been established, acts of desecration halted. When establishing the Gujarat sultanate, Zafar Khan targeted the royal temples of the chiefs of Idar, Junagadh, Diu, as well as Somnath. However when a chief co-operated, his temples were left alone. *Ibid.*, p. 191-192.

## The *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*

The *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* was completed in 1762 by Ali Mohammed Khan, who was an important administrator based in Ahmedabad City. This text deals with the historical trajectory of the sultans of Gujarat; it is essentially a narrative of the medieval period of Gujarati history. It was translated into English in a highly abridged form by James Bird in 1835, with an introduction that put the English author's slant on the text. The very purpose on translating the work, as expressed by James Bird himself was that 'it is incumbent on us, as rulers of India, to possess an accurate knowledge of its customs, manners, religious opinions, history, and commerce'.<sup>11</sup> Knowledge, indubitably, was an imperative for the colonizers to rule India, but the question of how this knowledge was constructed has to be explored. It is also worthwhile analysing the sources this knowledge was coming from and how they were being interpreted<sup>12</sup>, that is to say, how colonial epistemology was articulated, what information was conveying and what was the understanding of colonial administrators about Indian history. Then it must be kept on mind that there was a conscious endeavour 'to clear up the obscurity that exists in one portion of Indian history'<sup>13</sup> which meant interpreting and reimagining issues that were not clearly explained in the sources. Thus their own understanding was the tool to complete the gaps in Indian history with the risk of misrepresentation this implied. In analysing the *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, we shall look at two specific sections of the main work. In the first place, we shall explore the history of Islamic rules in

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<sup>11</sup> Ali Mohammed Khan, *Mirat-i-Ahmadi, The political and statistical history of Gujarat*, James Bird (trans), (reprint, 2005 of orig. edn London 1835).

<sup>12</sup> Rosane Rocher, 'British Orientalism in the Eighteenth Century: The Dialectics of Knowledge and Government' in Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter Van der Veer (eds), *Orientalism and the Post-colonial Predicament. Perspectives on South Asia*, (Philadelphia, 1993).

<sup>13</sup> Ali Mohammed Khan, *Mirat-i-Ahmadi. The political and statistical history*, p. vi.

India contained in the *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* itself and secondly, we shall focus on the introduction by James Bird to the work in a comparative way to see the contrast while narrating some historical episodes.

The *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* consists of two parts, that is, two volumes of the work itself and the *Khatima* or Supplement. The author, Ali Mohammed Khan was the *diwan* of Gujarat in the second half of the eighteenth century. One of his central purposes was to praise the achievements of the Muslim rulers of Gujarat, showing how they upheld Islam and Islamic virtues in constant combat against Hindu ‘idolaters’. Their alleged achievements in this respect were depicted in a hyperbolic way. This sycophantic aspect of his writing was generally ignored by subsequent historians, who took it as proof of a supposed Muslim intolerance without any serious inquiry into its veracity.

Because of the focus on Muslim rulers, there is very little in the *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* on the rule of the Hindu rajas of Gujarat. Rather than provide detailed descriptions of each reign, there are instead broad and sweeping generalizations about their government. Thus we are told that ‘three royal races of Hindús have successively ruled over this country, namely the Cháwura, Solankhí, and Baghílah races.’<sup>14</sup> The author also mentioned some information about the birth of the Hindu rajas and about their descendants.<sup>15</sup> However at no point we are told about their heroic deeds or important events. Moreover, the author mentioned in the preface to his work that ‘it must not be concealed, that, in what related to the Rájás, who preceded the dominion of the Mohammedans, and also in what regards the rulers of the province, under the Patan government of Delhí, prior to the Gujarát kings, the information was not wholly depended on: but such parts of the history as seemed well authenticated have

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p. 140.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

been here abridged.’<sup>16</sup> But no abbreviation was included when dealing with Muslim rules. Thus what the author suggested is that the history of the rajas of Gujarat could be easily simplified in abbreviation since it was not a priority for him. Undoubtedly, this fact shows that the Hindu history previous to Islam in India was irrelevant for Ali Mohammed Khan since his agenda was focused on underscoring the deeds of Muslim rulers by creating a quite positive image which meant depicting them in a fundamentalist fashion considered in a Muslim context as being faithful to their religion.

In this sense, the important aspect of the hyperbolic depiction is disentangling what aspects made of the sultans good rulers. On the one hand, there is the element of war. One of the main issues emphasized in the Persian chronicle is the fact that the sultans of Gujarat were always willing to exert belligerent activities against their enemies, whether minor Hindu rajas or even conspirators within their own administration. In many cases, the idea of Islam in the subcontinent we can grasp from the Persian work is that ‘the Mohammedans, stimulated by religious zeal and elated by the success of conquest... the whole were... devoted band of warriors, consecrated to the support of a common cause, and had been long accustomed to exertion.’<sup>17</sup> This is Bird’s comment in the historical introduction of his translation to the *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* but in this case, the text itself conveys to some extent this portrait, that is to say, a depiction showing the Muslim rulers as incessantly making war on Hindu believers. Some sultans are described as ‘desirous of carrying on a religious war against the infidels’<sup>18</sup> and in this sense, many episodes related to the conversion of different places are narrated but without a feature of tragedy other historical accounts would later develop.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 187

However a good disposition towards war was not the only virtue a Muslim ruler should have, for instance, ‘it is related that Sultan Muzafer was matchless in piety, learning, clemency, understanding, bravery and liberality. On account of too much clemency in him, he was called Sultan Muzafer the Clement’.<sup>19</sup> The idea conveyed by this depiction remains quite distant from the formulaic notions of bigotry and intolerance attributed in a general way to Muslim rulers and their administrations not only in India but in different world territories dominated by Islam. The sources show, contrary to this vision, that whereas some Muslim regimes were recalcitrant in war and religious affairs, others simply did not coincide with this scheme.

On the other hand, the chronicle’s author clearly emphasised a deep sense of religiosity as influencing the dynamics of some of the sultans in their war schemes. The sultans would display their conquest activities in order to eliminate idolatry. Thus religious fervour was one of the aspects considered to calibrate if a sultan was a worthy ruler. In this context, we are told, for instance, ‘that Sultan Mahmúd [Bigarrah] was the best of all the Gujarát kings, on account of his great justice and beneficence, his honouring and observing all the Mohammedan laws, and for the solidity of his judgment, whether in great or small matters.’<sup>20</sup> This sultan, being a zealous follower of Muslim law, deserved to be categorized as the best ruler of Gujarat. Elaborating further in his depiction we are told that he built shelters for travellers as well as mosques and granted special economic privileges for his soldiers because ‘if the Mohammedans live in debt, how is it possible they can fight?’<sup>21</sup> In the list of virtues compassion was also a defining characteristic. He granted his mercy in different

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<sup>19</sup> Lokhandwala’s version offers the work translated in its entirety. Ali Muhamad Khan, *Mirat-i-Ahmadi, A Persian History of Gujarat*, M.F. Lokhandwala (trans.), (Baroda: 1965). p. 55.

<sup>20</sup> Ali Mohammed Khan, *Mirat-i-Ahmadi. The political and statistical history*, p. 203.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

occasions even at conquest. Take for instance the episode of Rao Mandalik, a Hindu raja who declared his allegiance to the sultan. The latter is flexible and accepts the raja's loyalty instead of subjugating him and his kingdom. Then it is worth noticing that if there is a reference to the rule of a Hindu raja is only to show his obedience and subjugation to Muslim rulers.

However, this obedience was not accepted by the sultan unconditionally, thus 'in the year of the Hijra 872, A.D. 1467-8, having heard that the Rao Mandalik visited the temple of idolatry, and went there with all the ensigns of royalty, the Sultan became ashamed of royalty, and appointed forty thousand horse, with many elephants, to take away the royal umbrella and other kingly ensigns from him.'<sup>22</sup> When the sultan was asked by the raja about the reason for conquering 'his obedient subject, who had committed no fault' the sultan replied that "'there could be no greater fault than that of infidelity, and, if he was to expect tranquillity, he must acknowledge the unity of God, and secure to himself his country; for that, otherwise, he would extinguish him.'"<sup>23</sup> On its part, Lokhandwala's complete twentieth-century translation of the *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* corroborates this episode by showing a Sultan expressing his view that 'what offence can be equal to unbelief.'<sup>24</sup> From this it is derived that there were moments to show compassion but when the issue was idolatry there was no space to be sympathetic, on the contrary, the sultans had to be inflexible with the *kafirs* or non-believers. But as expressed, the list of attributes shaping a sultan in a positive perspective followed a wide spectrum ranging from recalcitrance to clemency and from religiosity to liberality. However the main question is how such a spectrum was reduced to a default depiction of Muslim rulers as orthodox and fanatics?

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 207-208.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>24</sup> Ali Muhamad Khan, *Mirat-i-Ahmadi, A Persian History of Gujarat*, p. 47.

In this sense, the narration of the destruction of the temple of Somnath is emblematic.<sup>25</sup> It will provide us with a major scope to fully appreciate the kind of narration contributing to shape a fundamentalist image of Muslims in the subcontinent and in the Gujarat region. This is particularly clear in the figure of the Turkish general that was supposed to destroy and desecrate that temple in western India. The rhetoric about this event had created a memory perpetuating an idea of confrontation between the major religions in the subcontinent, Hinduism and Islam, the former being the ‘original’ religion of the country and the second one, the ‘foreigner’s’ religion that was considered by Hindu groups to have been spread mainly through the sword by the Muslim invaders arriving into the country.

The Somnath temple is located in south Gujarat near to a city called Prabhas Patan, and it was supposedly destroyed by Mahmud of Ghazni in 1025 A.D. This episode is one of the most impressive in the minds of Gujarati society. However it is particularly important to point out that a neat difference can be appreciated in the narration of Somnath’s destruction included in the historical introduction written by Bird; the account made in the *Mirat-i-Ahmad* itself and also the narration provided in the *Khatima* to the Persian work as well as in a more recent and complete translation (1965) of this work by M.F. Lokhandwala, the head of the department of Persian of the M.S. University of Baroda. Thus, Bird’s translation of the *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* expressed that

In the reign of Jamúnd, A. Hij. 416, A.D. 1025-6, Sultán Mahmúd Ghaznaví marched for Somnáth by way of Multán; when, having invaded the territories of Nahrwálah Patan, Rájá Jamúnd quitted that city, and fled. Mahmúd, after capturing Nahrwálah, made the necessary preparations for his army to march on Somnáth; and, in the month of Zú-l-kadah of the same year, accomplished the conquest of that place. Having afterwards received intelligence that

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<sup>25</sup> For a detailed analysis of the discursive formation around the Somnath episode see the illuminating study by Romila Thapar, *Somanath*.

Rájá Jamúnd, the ruler of Nahrwálah, had at this time taken refuge in a certain fort, distant forty-five farsangs, Mahmúd resolved on capturing it.<sup>26</sup>

Thus the Somnath episode is not depicted in epic terms at all. Instead there is a quite neutral description lacking of the dramatic character imprinted in later narratives of the episode, both colonial and Indian, and even the *Khatima* itself. As a matter of fact, more than a description, there is a mere mention or reference of the historical fact. It is important to notice that Bird only translated a minimal part of this prolific work.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, even if the British author's version is abridged, the narration of this episode corresponds to the account depicted in Lokhandwala's version which as stated, is the reproduction of the *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* in its entirety. Thus Lokhandwala's text also refers to the raiding of Somnath in quite plain a depiction, far from being considered as a landmark incident in the history of India, it was not conceived in a heroic or tragic dimension. It is as if this episode was another illustration among many and it had no transcendence at all in the Indian past, which is contrary to what several Hindu authors and organisations have widely spread when dealing with the Somnath raiding by Mahmud of Ghazni, referring it as a foundational event in the history of the hostilities between Hindus and Muslims and seeing the episode through the lens of a religious war.

During the reign of Jamand Solanki, in the year 416 Hijri, Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni raised the banner for jihad (religious war) and started for Somnath by way of Multan he happened to pass by Naharwalah Pattan. Raja Jamand had no strength to offer resistance. He left Patan and fled. Sultan Mahmud gained ascendancy over Pattan. He collected whatever was needed for his soldiers and then proceeded towards Somnath... After the conquest of Somnath, he learnt that Raja Jamand, ruler fo Nahrwalah, who had fled at the time of march of the victorious king, had now garrisoned himself in the fort... Sultan Mahmud cherished a desire to conquer that fort.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ali Mohammed Khan, *Mirat-i-Ahmadi, The political and statistical history*, p. 144-145.

<sup>27</sup> The entire Persian work has two volumes and Bird only translated a third part of the first volume.

<sup>28</sup> Ali Muhamad Khan, *Mirat-i-Ahmadi, A Persian History of Gujarat*, p. 23.



Thus both translations elaborate the same scenario for the conquest of Somnath by Mahmud, a plain fact, a mere mention no graphic at all, neither heroic nor traumatic or due to be praised or condemned according to either perspectives. The two versions are offered to the reader without the pathos which later narratives of the fact will categorically show. The episode of Somnath in both translations seems to be centred more on the aftermath of the temple subjugation, the emphasis was on who was supposed to administer and rule the conquered territory when Mahmud returned to his city, Ghazni, in Afghanistan. And it is, actually, the account of this issue with such a Dabeshlim as main character, a more elaborated aspect when narrating the episode of the desecration of this temple.<sup>29</sup> Whereas Somnath destruction is practically only mentioned in a patently brief account, the story of Dabeshlim as potential administrator and his nemesis, called by the same name, Dabeshlim was comparatively longer and narrated in deeper detail. This is the case for the *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* itself and its respective translation by Bird and Lokhandwala but the Somnath episode is clearly further elaborated in other sources.

In this sense, there is a visible change in the *Khatima*, the temperance in the account of this episode is not present, and instead there are more vivid depictions with a tragic dimension. In this volume, Somnath is described as the most important temple, centre for Hindus from all over India. And there is also a reference that the idol worshipped there was ‘the greatest Manat’.<sup>30</sup> Among some Muslim writers the explanation for attacking Somnath was that the goddess of the Semitic pantheon, Manat –belonging to a divine trilogy together

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<sup>29</sup> For details of this story see Bird and Lokhandwala’s translations.

<sup>30</sup> Ali Mohammed Khan, *The Supplement to the Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, Syed Nawab Ali and Charles Norman Seddon, (trans) (Baroda: 1928).

with Lat and Uzza— was worshipped in Somnath.<sup>31</sup> These goddesses were venerated in the pre-Islamic period and their worshipping was considered to be idolatry.

The narration of the episode of Somnath offered in the *Khatima*, as stated above, follows a different pattern: ‘Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni marched from Ghazni in 416 A.H. to destroy and break the temple.’<sup>32</sup> In this narrative, Mahmud’s manoeuvre had a particular aim, destroying Somnath. Thus, it is contrary to what the *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* narrates which circumscribes the event within a broader campaign of conquest. The people of Somnath according to the *Supplement*

hastened in regiments to the temple, and surrounded the Somnath and fought with tear and cries for help, till more than fifty thousand were slain and the fort was conquered. Then Sultan Mahmud entered the temple, and saw a place broad and long, containing fifty-six columns, each adorned with gems. And the Somnath was an idol of stone, buried for five yards in the ground. And when Mahmud’s eyes fell on it, he broke it with the mace which he had in his hands. And he took away a piece of the stone to Ghazni, and with it paved the threshold of the Jami Masjid...<sup>33</sup>

Comparing this narrative with the previously analyzed translations of the *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* the differences are obvious. It is not only a more dramatic episode; the actual importance of the temple is emphasized in this account. It is said that ten thousand villages served the temple and at least twenty thousand Brahman priests also rendered their services to it. At the same time hundreds of dancing girls were consecrated to Somnath.<sup>34</sup> In this context, both temple and idol were quite meaningful within the Hindu religion to such a degree that ‘after its destruction by Sultan Mahmud the temple was rebuilt by the Hindus, but in the year 696 A.H

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<sup>31</sup> Romila Thapar, *Somnath*, p. 50.

<sup>32</sup> Ali Mohammed Khan, *The Supplement*, p. 135-136.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

Alf Khan, who was sent by Sultan Ala-ad-din Khilji to conquer Gujarat, destroyed it again.’<sup>35</sup>

Thus the *Khatima* provides an account highlighting the importance of Somnath within Hinduism. Then the destruction of this temple was not as simple or similar to any other because this temple was supposed to have a special symbolism for Hindu believers according to this narration. This symbolism, in turn, is mirrored in Mahmud’s eagerness for destroying the temple, his coming to Prabhas Patan in order to destroy the holy shrine would stand for the relevance Somnath was supposed to have among Hindu community. The constant destruction and rebuilding of the temple is an iconic ingredient in subsequent Hindu nationalist depictions of an alleged fundamentalist intolerance of Muslims towards the Hindu religion. A long lasting battle for the temple preservation is the most vivid reference to exemplify what some sectors say to be a perennial confrontation between Islam and Hinduism. However the persistent destruction of the temple, its continuous supposed conversion into a mosque and its theoretical multiple reconstruction presuppose a permanent destruction of a mosque erected in the temple’s place, but the sources do not provide such an account.<sup>36</sup> But this would be another issue for analysis and it is beyond the scope of this chapter, since the idea is not elucidating if the temple’s destruction by Mahmud indeed occurred and if so, if it happened in the way some sources relate the event. But enough is to say that Sanskrit contemporary inscriptions do not mention the event.<sup>37</sup>

On the other hand, if we delve into Bird’s account in his historical introduction to the Persian chronicle, a more exacerbated narrative will be revealed. In this case, Mahmud is portrayed in an inflexible fashion, as ‘a bigoted adherent to the Sunnī faith; and a stickler

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p. 137.

<sup>36</sup> Romila Thapar, *Somnath*, p. 67.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. p. 86.

regarding points of doctrine. The idolaters of India, were, therefore, the object of his aversion.’<sup>38</sup> His incursions into India were branded by the translator as ‘crusades against the Hindus or idolatry’ and his soldiers were called ‘Mohammedan crusaders’. In this way, his invasion of India was seen to be motivated above all by religious conviction; one in which ‘the blood of the idolaters was made to flow, that the intolerant spirit of Islám might be gratified.’<sup>39</sup> Rather than being a one-off affair, such campaigns were said to be continuous.

Thus

The recital of the enormities committed during these barbarous expeditions sickens and fatigues the mind by the sameness of the narrative; towns were captured and set on fire; temples destroyed; idols broken, or converted into currency, when found of precious metals; the inhabitants pillaged and carried into captivity; while commerce and cultivation were totally ruined and neglected... Yet the unsatiable [*sic*] mind of Mahmud was not satisfied with the sufferings he had inflicted on idolatry, or the wealth he had acquired; and, when affairs in other quarters left his thoughts at liberty, he again turned his attention to India.<sup>40</sup>

From this perspective, his rapacious fanaticism against idolatry would have encouraged him to carry out his Somnath campaign which Bird described as ‘the last crusade against idolatry’<sup>41</sup>. The British translator claimed that ‘the Hindús [then] venerated the idol more than any other; the attendants washed it daily with water brought from the Ganges’.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, we are told that the temple received the revenue of ten thousand villages and two thousand priests provided their services to the temple, and again there is the information about five hundred dancers consecrated to Somnath.<sup>43</sup> It is worth noticing that the figures related to the people –going from dancers, to priests, and musicians— rendering their services to Somnath

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<sup>38</sup> Ali Mohammed Khan, *Mirat-i-Ahmadi, The political and statistical history*, p. 19.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34-35.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

are more conservative in Bird's account than in the *Supplement*. For instance, there is a difference of eighteen thousand priests serving the temple; according to Bird there were two thousand Brahmans while *the Supplement* stated that it was twenty thousand; the former mentioned three hundred musicians whereas the latter three thousand. This variation in figures has to do with Bird's idea that

Poetry and fable have been alike employed to adorn the narrative and magnify the importance of this conquest. But if the record of past events borrows more from fancy than memory, and substitutes amusement for instruction, the order of knowledge is inverted; and, where history ought to have commenced, fable has not yet terminated. In this matter, doubt is better than credulity; and, if we hesitate to give assent to much that has been said of Somnáth, we will not insult the spirit of philosophy.<sup>44</sup>

In this sense, Bird claimed to be cautious and temperate in his narration because he did not intend to produce amusement but knowledge. The very account of Somnath's capture is not as dramatic as his previous depiction of Muslim conquests in general terms, with the graphic picture of rivers of blood flowing from the idolaters to satisfy cruel Muslims. His story of Somnath goes that

the place [was] captured; and five thousand Hindús slain in the storm... Mahmúd, on entering the temple, observed a covered apartment, whose roof was supported by six pillars set with jewels; and here stood the idol... [which] was broken in pieces by the king's own hand; and orders were given to his attendants, that the pieces, carried to Ghazní, were to be cast before the great mosque in honour of the triumph obtained by Islám. By this expedition incalculable wealth was collected, and exceeded many thousand dínárs; though the story of the jewels found in the belly of the idol is the invention of some narrator, who loved fable more than truth.<sup>45</sup>

The point of restraint and objectivity is interesting even if it was not maintained by the author throughout his historical introduction which, as seen, contains passages that brand Islamic regimes as bloodthirsty, tyrannical or merciless with Hindu believers. However Bird's stance

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

is relevant in attempting to assess the veracity of historical facts, which is something that seems to have been whether deliberately or unconsciously neglected particularly for the Somnath episode but also when narrating the history of Islam in the subcontinent in a general perspective. It is worth acknowledging Bird's effort at being moderate, even if to some extent he did not succeed in following his own wise advice. Nevertheless it might be said that he set a precedent to reflect on colonial and Indian historiography about Islam, but at the same time, his account provided an exacerbated depiction of Muslim conquests which has been a version widely circulated in different spheres at different periods.

On the other hand, a final aspect of the *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* worth exploring is the account of the aggressions on Muslims by Hindu rajas. Lokhandwala's translation is our unique source for this aspect, since Bird's incomplete translation and his introduction as well as the *Khatima* do not provide any further information in this respect. For example, it is said that

during the subedari of Maharaj Abhey Singh: plunder and pillage of property and wealth of the poor, digging of houses under a suspicion of buried treasure, insult and dishonour to Islam, defamation of Muslims, demolition of masjids and houses of saintly persons, prevalence of Hindu usages, falsehood, sale and purchase of intoxicants and pigs publicly in every lane and bazaar. It is not hidden from any one of the commonalty and the elite. His Rajput confederates captured Muslim women by temptation and inducement and some by force and fright, converted them to heresy and carried them to Marwar. A great calamity upon Islam is that those Muslim women are still alive in that region.<sup>46</sup>

According to this account Maharaja Abhai Singh of Marwar (1724-1749) was a Hindu bigot who not only persecuted Muslims but also Bishnois in 1730 that were rather a syncretic sect. But the recreation of the previous scenario is worthwhile keeping in mind because later accounts of the Muslim attacks on Hindus would follow a similar narrative style telling of the desecration of temples instead of mosques; of the forced conversion into Islam; of the harassment of Hindu women by Muslims; of the cow slaughter by Muslims to offend the

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<sup>46</sup> Ali Muhamad Khan, *Mirat-i-Ahmadi, A Persian History of Gujarat*, p. 709.

religious feelings of the Hindus. This is a recurrent aspect, the use of particular kinds of animals to upset the ‘antagonistic’ community; in the case of Hindus, they would utilize pigs to offend Muslims given their perception of this animal as taboo for its uncleanness, and in the case of Muslims, they would carry out cow slaughter as a means to hurt Hindu religious beliefs that perceive this animal as holy. Then, in general terms, the chronicles narrating Muslim aggression against Hinduism underline the antagonistic attitude towards Hindu believers. As Romila Thapar has noticed, the argumentative formations about Islam became a sort of conventionalism to convey the horror Islamic waves were supposed to have caused to India. This way both Hindu and Muslim narratives referring to the aggression at the hands of the other community follow a symmetric pattern in recreating the sufferings endured during these attacks. We shall explore this in deeper detail in chapter three that deals with, if tangentially, the Muslim activism of orthodox organizations against Hindus. But unfortunately, this rhetoric was adopted without much trouble or without questioning on the part of nineteenth and twentieth century authors both colonial and Indian in spite of some authors’ warnings on the hyperbolic aspect of the sources. This will be particularly evident in writers like K.M. Munshi who, through his fictional, historical or political works, elaborated a depiction of Islam in India mirroring the one just cited above. Thus the Gujarati writer denounced the desecration of Hindu shrines; the women raped or kidnapped; the forcible conversions as the kindest option offered by the aggressors to Hindu people; Hindus being enslaved; priests and artists escaping to obscure villages to protect themselves from Muslims and the locking up of Hindu women in order to safeguard them from this dangerous situation.<sup>47</sup> Thus comparing both depictions, the writer conveyed a general idea of an Islam dislocating Hindu society and values, which, in turn, made Hindus less ‘liberal’ or more

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<sup>47</sup> K.M. Munshi, *Gujarāt and its literature from early times to 1852*, (Bombay, 1967), p. 132.

‘backward’, according to colonial standards, particularly with women, in order to defend them from the Islamic onslaughts. Munshi, such as other writers of his period, deliberately omitted mentioning the production of a Hindu-Muslim synthesis as an outcome of the long-term coexistence of both cultures in the same geography. This will be later developed in chapter six.

From the above it can be said that the *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* is a fundamental source in the process of shaping the image of Muslim community as a martial or militant community displaying its belligerent qualities against the Hindu civilization. Hindus, in this binary construction, should be the opposite of Muslims, that is to say, weak or emasculated, and of course, respectful and tolerant of other religious creeds. This led to a depiction of both communities in essentialized terms. And henceforth it was easy to use other labels indiscriminately for further descriptions of Muslims such as fanatic and intolerant when describing this community in general and this idea was gradually reinforced in the historiography about Islam in the subcontinent.

As seen above, there is no doubt about the reason for portraying Islamic rulers in this fashion on the part of Muslim writers, since being a strong believer, in a positive sense, or a fundamentalist, in a negative one, was a characteristic to calibrate the sultans as good rulers. But the real issue with this is the historical transcendence of the ‘representationality’ and the image of this community as visibly inflexible. The social consequences of this depiction still reverberate in current Indian politics, by the BJP in Gujarat, for instance, that explode a historical consciousness of antagonism produced in those years.



## *Ras Mala* and the historical idea of Gujarat

The reflections on the *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* lead us to explore how this particular way of looking at Islamic regimes in Gujarat was gradually incorporated by colonial and Indian writers. They recurrently used the Persian chronicles or their English translations with the respective introductions or prefaces to them as sources which provided a particular reading of Indian historical development. The analysis of Alexander Forbes' *Ras Mala* published in 1856 will be useful in elucidating the representation of Islam and Gujarat as it was being embedded in the social imagination of the nineteenth century on its ways for its further elaboration by Indian intellectuals in Gujarat.

A fundamental aspect to mention on Forbes' *Ras Mala* is something that the editor to the 1878 edition of this work mentions in his introduction, namely, 'imbued as he was with a thorough admiration for the Rajpoot races, we can hardly expect Mr. Forbes to be quite fair to the Mahrattas'<sup>48</sup> or Muslims. Thus his account of the history of Gujarat revealed his fondness for the 'Rajput races'. He shared this admiration with James Tod who in his *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, elaborated an exhaustive history of this ruling class. This work was well known by Forbes and even if he was at some point critical of it, mainly in the aspect of the sources utilized, accounts and genealogies related by bards, Forbes himself used the Rajput bardic histories to articulate a Rajput-focused history in an attempt to fill the gap left by Muslim chronicles that did not elaborate further when historicizing on Hindu kingdoms. This is precisely one of the merits of Forbes' text, to provide an exhaustive account of Hindu rulers, which was a lacuna in the Persian chronicles.

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<sup>48</sup> Major J.W. Watson, 'Introduction', to Alexander K. Forbes, *Ras Mala or Hindoo Annals of the Province of Goozerat in Western India*, (London 1878, orig. edn, 2 vols, London 1856), i, p. vii.

For both Forbes and Tod, history was a crucial aspect. Therefore they undertook the production of these works to recover periods of history considered to be neglected but also tried to encourage the history writing task. Thus Forbes founded the Gujarat Vernacular Society to stimulate the writing of regional history. In the next section of this chapter we shall analyse the reply to his promotion of regional history. As for James Tod, he not only produced a history of Rajasthan but praised the history writing activity of India in an attempt to counter what other colonialists said about India lacking historical records. Thus 'to the notion that India possesses no national history' Tod stated that

After eight centuries of galling subjection to conquerors totally ignorant of the classical language of the Hindus; after almost every capital city had been repeatedly stormed and sacked by barbarous, bigoted, and exasperated foes; it is too much to expect that the literature of the country should not have sustained, in common with other important interests, irretrievable losses.<sup>49</sup>

But while defending Indian historical tradition he revealed his view that groups of foreigners destroyed some historical records, and Muslims were included in these groups. This way they were perceived by the author as detrimental to Hindu civilization in what would become a mainstream opinion. Although Forbes largely followed Tod in this antipathy to Muslim rule, he was not wholly negative, acknowledging that there were some positive aspects. However, in preferring bardic to Persian sources in setting out his history, Forbes created an inevitable bias in favour of the former.

An important aspect to highlight in Forbes' *Ras Mala* is his division of the historical periods: Hindu, Muslim and then, Maratha and British. Differently to the *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, *Ras Mala* is equally exhaustive in depicting both Hindu and Muslim rule since Forbes' aim is to articulate the history of the province of Gujarat by paying attention to the different regimes

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<sup>49</sup> James Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan or the Central and Western Rajput States of India*, (reprint. with intro. by William Crook, 1971, of orig. edn. 3 vols. London, 1829-1832), i, p. vii.

regardless of the religious creed of the sovereign in turn. In this context, Forbes provided details of the regimes of Hindu rajas, Muslim rulers, the Marathas and the British.<sup>50</sup> This periodization embodied Forbes' understanding of Indian history presupposing a Hindu glorious past, a Muslim period of tyranny, a Maratha rule not less inimical to Hindus than the Muslim one, according to this perspective, and a British administration benevolent, organized and quite appreciated by the Indian subjects. Looking at Indian history in these terms became the norm when historizing the different groups ruling and conquering the subcontinent, and this produced a tempting opportunity to simplify the historical stages in the light of their religious category without delving into the aspect of coexistence of the different communities and their mutual influences and contributions. Forbes gave a space in his account on the different administrations in India without praising one in particular because of its religion and besides, he was aware, for instance, that 'the Mohummedan historians, for the most part, refer to [Hindu chieftainships] only under the titles of infidels, insurgents, or rebels'<sup>51</sup> without any effort at analyzing or even describing the Hindu rules. Then, as an attempt to amend this and because of his own admiration for Rajput groups, Forbes' work elaborated further the Hindu regimes and what their impact was on their societies and their subjects. The recovery of the history of Hindu kingdoms was undertaken by Forbes because of the neglect he perceived on this issue in the Muslim chronicles which simply referred to these administrations as heretical or alien to the Islamic faith.

This way we are told that king Bheem Dev 'was a favourite of his subjects, because, in his reign, they suffered no calamity, being not only protected from secret depredators, but

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<sup>50</sup> Several colonial and Indian authors started adopting and disseminating an idea of Indian history following this kind of periodization. See Riho Isaka, 'The Construction of Gujarati Identity in the Late Nineteenth Century: Debates over Language, Literature and History', *Bulletin of the Institute of Oriental Culture*, 137 (1999), p. 246.

<sup>51</sup> Alexander K. Forbes, *Ras Mala*, p. 222.

also from the open enemies that might have brought the horrors of fire and plunder to their towns.’<sup>52</sup> Although the author’s stated purpose was not to valorise the Rajput rulers as against Muslim rulers as such, his focus on the heroic deeds and calamities of the former makes them the chief protagonists in his history of Gujarat. Like Bird in his translation of the *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, Forbes warns us about the partiality of some works while narrating historical events. This way, his attitude was to reject the account on Somnath as told by ‘Mohammedan historians’ because for him ‘the treasures of the bardic repertoire’<sup>53</sup> seemed more stimulating. He preferred to follow narratives of Hindu traditions for the administration of Bheem raja, the ruler at the time the looting of Somnath took place. However, Forbes noticed that by following the account of the bard Krishnâjee, his source, some descriptions of Hindu figures could be biased because they were given ‘evidently *con amore*’.<sup>54</sup> But the fact of preferring a particular account over another meant pointing out one source as ‘more reliable’. Even if Forbes warned against partiality, he himself ended up elaborating a history showing a pro-Hindu stance although more nuanced than Bird’s translation or later accounts.

In this discursive line, an important aspect developed by Forbes is the idea that the jealousies among the Hindu rulers prevented them uniting against the supposed common enemy – Islam. Given this, they were unable to face Mahmud of Ghazni in a collective way when he desecrated the temple of Somnath in the eleventh century. Then, ‘The King of Unhilwârâ was, it is said, invited with the other princes of the land to join in this last united stand for the religion and liberties of the Hindoos, but though in former days, when the destroyer of Somnâth was at the threshold, Bheem Dev had combined with the Lord of

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. xiii.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

Sâmbhur against the common enemy, the ancient jealousies between their houses prevented him from following where the Chohân sovereign led, and the forces of Goozerat were inactive...<sup>55</sup> The narrative conveys the message that a common pan-Hindu cause was the incentive for the Hindu rajas to organize a joint action against Muslim. This kind of discourse can be labelled as anachronistic in two senses: the non-existence of Hinduism as a monolithic religion and also the idea of Gujarat as a unified entity which almost remained unquestioned in subsequent approaches to the region. Forbes had seen in the region, its geographical frontiers, the language and society as ‘legitimate constituents’ of Gujarat’s past.<sup>56</sup>

A contrasting vision in the previous episode, on the other hand, is that Muslims had always remained united in their different activities, particularly the military ones. In this, there is again a binary depiction of Muslims and Hindus: the former martial and united the second ones weak and disorganized. In addition, the permanence of this notion is evident and authors of the early twentieth century articulated a pedagogical discourse describing this period as a disruptive one that should not be repeated in the face of a supposed contemporary threat from Islam. This influential view was also circulated in Gujarati fiction, in his *Master of Gujarat* and *Jaya Somnath* –analyzed in chapter seven of this research— K.M. Munshi explicitly mentioned the division among Hindus as a major problem to overcome. Both in his literary and political writings, the Gujarati writer built up the idea of division as a fundamental aspect that contributed to the conquest of India by the Muslims in the medieval period and to the potential threat for the creation of Pakistan in the first half of the twentieth century. Other authors such as Govardhanram Tripathi (1855-1907), one of the makers of

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>56</sup> Aparna Kapadia, ‘Alexander Forbes and the Making of Regional History’ in Edward Simpson and Aparna Kapadia (eds), *The Idea of Gujarat*. p. 6.

Gujarati fiction<sup>57</sup>, also considered Muslim arrivals as unfavourable to Hindu development.

Thus he wrote that

A mental and moral thralldom in India bodes no good to rulers or to ruled, and the former had better guard itself against setting an example of imposing the thralldom upon those who, for the good of all concerned, ought to be left free. The thralldom has arisen in the dark ages of the country, to counteract the conversion of the children of her soil by the contact of the foreigner and not less by the growing licences of the ages due to the loosening influences of free thinking and free living which Buddhism and a number of internal causes wrought to a high pitch even before the Mahomedans came. This looseness or licentiousness of the country was sought to be cured by discipline, and discipline was evolved by calling the people to return into the fold of the orthodox system of belief and practices, and to remain there without a budge. The intellect of man seems to have yielded to the powerful appeals of this call, and what was in the first instance rigid discipline seems to have been turned into thralldom of the mind. The thralldom did its good work against the rude hand of the Mahomedan, and the present age seems to consider it equally efficacious against fascinating allurements of the Western fishermen, if not flirt.<sup>58</sup>

In Govardhanram's view Islam was not the sole negative influence on Hindu history but also other cultural tendencies such as Buddhism; the arrival of these cultures undermined 'free thinking and free living' according to his opinion. Then his position is less judgmental than other writers' stance that blamed specifically Islam for the supposed backwardness of Hindu civilization. Govardhanram Tripathi thought that Indians needed protection from the outsiders,<sup>59</sup> but the obvious difference was that he did not mean Muslims necessarily. It is clear that 'the allurements of the Western fishermen' were not quite positive either. This way his 'moderate' negative considerations of Islam are an intermediate step in the trajectory to portray Islam as the burden for Hindu civilization with a devastating impact on society, which is an aspect that will be evident in twentieth century writings.

Similarly, the *Ras Mala* articulated the idea that the glorious Hindu period was finished because of a partisan attitude of the Hindu rajas. If it is true that Forbes shared the

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<sup>57</sup> Sudhir Chandra, *The Oppressive Present*, p. 22.

<sup>58</sup> Govardhanram Madhavrám Tripáthi, *Scrap Book 1894-1904*, (Bombay, 1959). p. 202

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

contemporary perspective of some authors that considered that the Hindu splendour was wiped out by the Muslim invasions in the subcontinent, he also considered that there were previous conditions weakening the Hindu dynasties. For instance, we are told that during the reign of Châmoond ‘the sun of the Rajpoots began to decline before the Moslem crescent, that a strange and furious invader burst upon the plains of India, that ancient dynasties were shaken, ancient gods –the eternal Muhâ Kâl himself— confounded with the dust...’<sup>60</sup> Thus Islam is to be blamed for the vanished glory of Hindu civilization but the rajas had their responsibility as well, even if there remains the idea that ‘many a splendid metropolis must have adorned the plains of Aryaverta before the avalanche of Mohummedan invasion fell from the western mountains upon the land. We have, however, more definite traces of these glories of by-gone days...’<sup>61</sup>. It is interesting to note that later writings and writers omitted descriptive nuances and blamed Islam for the disappearance of Hindu glory. This gained momentum and became a more pervasive theory for what was considered the fallen state of Hindu civilization when accepting colonial depictions.

On the other hand, a point of unquestioned relevance is the major weight Forbes attributed to religion as a moving force in several contexts. The common place is the Islamic conquests seen in religious terms in greater depth. But in this case the Hindus are also depicted as quite enthusiastic for their religion. The narration offered by Forbes projects the idea of an explicit religious conflict between Hinduism and Islam in the general landscape of the Indian/Hindu civilization. Thus the image conveyed is that whenever it was possible for the Hindus they carried out the heroic task of recovering their shrines, but this was only possible with Mahmud’s successors that were for so long ‘occupied with intestine feuds,

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<sup>60</sup> Alexander Forbes, *Ras Mala*, p. 50-51.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. xi.

which prevented their active interference with the affairs of India.’<sup>62</sup> In this context, the defence of their religion was supposed to be the stimulus of Hindu action against Muslims and in this way

the Hindoos found an opportunity of making a grand effort to shake off the yoke which oppressed them [and] from thence the Rajpoots marched towards the fort of Nuggurkot... The God of Nuggurkot was induced to grace with his presence the recovered shrine, and so great was the enthusiasm excited [*sic*] by this triumph of their religion, that thousands of pilgrims hurried thither from all parts of Hindoostan to present their offerings of gold and silver and jewels, and to restore to its pristine splendour the temple of the fort of Bheem.’<sup>63</sup>

Thus the inhabitants, not only from the Gujarati region but from all over India, seemed to have got involved in the epic of recovering the temple and celebrating its liberation from the Muslim subjugation. A dynamic of loss and recovery of Hindu shrines is suggested as the essential action taking place between both religious communities.

Elaborating further on this, the account of the looting of Somnath brings out the way the narratives of this period were becoming more emphatic in their underlining of the religious aspect in the interaction between the inhabitants of the subcontinent and exogenous groups. To begin with, we are told about the campaign to Somnath that ‘it was against the gods, however, and not the kings of the Hindoos, that Mahmood now made war...’.<sup>64</sup> In this sense, Forbes highlighted the religious feature of this operation instead of privileging the mundane aspect of conquest. Bird, as seen before, also emphasized its religious characteristic but at the same time it depicted it as part of a general scheme for conquest and looting. The narrative of Somnath recreated by Forbes highlights the theoretical religious mission of Mahmud in which the Turkish general

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 56.



sought to perpetuate his name by the destruction of an idolatrous shrine... [and] eleven expeditions against the Hindoo enemies of Islam had, for a time, satisfied the avarice and satiated the zeal of the Sultan of Ghuznee; but the faith of the idolaters was unbroken... the champion of the faith once more called up his energy, and determined on a final effort which should transmit his name to posterity among the greatest scourges of idolatry, if not the greatest promoters of Islam.<sup>65</sup>

Thus whether a 'promoter' or 'scourge' of Islam, Mahmud of Ghazni had a mission to fulfil which crystallized in the expansion of Islam and defeating idolatry in India but not by proselytizing or persuading Hindus, instead by means of the sword according to Forbes' history. The general wanted his name to be remembered because of his achievement of destroying such an iconic temple as Somnath was supposed to be.

An additional element in Forbes' narrative is that he shows the actions of both parts in the Somnath episode by depicting the reaction undertaken by the Hindus at the desecration of their temple. This contrary to Bird's historical introduction for the *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* that omitted the Hindu response to Mahmud's raid

Mahmood found a host of men in arms ready to risk their lives for the protection of Somnath, and the punishment of the invaders... [The Hindus] proclaimed defiance, and vaunted that the mighty Someshwur had drawn the Mohammedans thither to blast them in a moment, and avenge the insults of the gods of India... The battlements were in a short time cleared by the archers, and the Hindoos, astonished and dispirited at the unexpected fury of the assault, leaving the ramparts, crowded into the sacred precincts, and prostrating themselves in tears before the symbol of their god, implored his aid.'<sup>66</sup>

In recreating the defence of the vanquished, there is also a quite visible religious aspect that tells of the conflict between Hinduism and Islam, with tropes of looting and conquest being rather subordinated to religious matters. The narrative suggests the undertaking of a holy war on both sides, and the fact that a whole city was being conquered was rather ignored. Then after having captured the temple he fulfilled his assumed mission of desecrating it and while he 'was thus employed, a crowd of Brahmins, petitioning his

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

attendants, offered an enormous ransom if the king would desist from further mutilation.

Mahmood hesitated, and his courtiers hastened to offer the advice which they knew would be acceptable; but after a moment's pause, the Sultan exclaimed that he could be known by posterity not as "the idol-seller," but as "*the destroyer*."'<sup>67</sup>

The Somnath episode, in the light of this kind of discourse, became a symbolic event to remind Hindus of the persistent tyranny and fanaticism of Muslims, since 'the Mohummedans also took care to repeat their periodical achievement of "destroying the idol of Somnath, which had been again set up after the time of Mahmood of Ghuznee."'<sup>68</sup> In place of the hyperbolic praise of Islam found in the *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, we find here instead a similar – though opposite – valorisation of Hinduism.

At some point Forbes tries to be more balanced in his account of the history of Gujarat, with some success at times. The general impression, however, is that Muslims were as a rule warmongering fanatics moved by a religious zeal and that Hindus were generally given to contemplation more than bellicosity. As an illustration of this we are told that Chamoond 'thoughts [were] perhaps occupied rather with the trees in his garden, or with the reservoirs which he was constructing, than with preparations for the day of battle.'<sup>69</sup>

Even though the religious aspect was underlined at different moments, the Islamic invasion was not seen as something totally overwhelming for Hindus, thus an example was provided of a Muslim ruler who attempted to follow a conciliatory policy with the Hindus, which actually caused alarm among the most orthodox sectors of Muslims.<sup>70</sup> In this same

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 214.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 225.

discursive line we are told that the Muslims never accomplished the conquest of ‘Goozerat’ in its entirety.<sup>71</sup> In this sense Riho Isaka’s argument about Forbes being so negative about Muslim rulers in Gujarat should be nuanced, since even if the British author mentioned that the Muslim tyranny was represented in Islamic architecture, he also provided positive descriptions of some Islamic administrations.<sup>72</sup>

But a final word on the Maratha and British period is required. When referring to the Maratha rule, the depiction is no more positive than when describing the arrival of Islam in India and Gujarat. The Maratha were depicted both by colonialist and Indian writers, as a people who used ‘to burn the suburbs for the purpose of intimidation’.<sup>73</sup> But the inhabitants, to some extent, seemed to be used or at least, knew how to cope with this situation since they were willing to offer money to Maratha leaders in order to persuade them to retire without causing much trouble. Nevertheless, and according to a Maharashtrian historian not identified, the Maratha period was not peaceful at all, ‘a deceitful calm succeeded; – the fall of the rain brought back the cheering green... Tranquillity seemed to reign, where, a short time before, nothing was to be seen but perpetual skirmishing, murder and robbery in open day, caravans pillaged even when strongly escorted, and villages burning or deserted.’<sup>74</sup>

Moreover, Maratha leaders are shown as being mainly driven by a lust for wealth, leading to them extracting money from the inhabitants ruthlessly for their own benefit. Forbes states that ‘the Mahratta leaders collect[ed] all the revenue, but afford[ed] no

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 223.

<sup>72</sup> See Riho Isaka, ‘Writings of History: the notion of Gujarat and the Gujaratis in the late nineteenth century’ *Bulletin of the Institute of Oriental Culture*, 139 (2000) p. 157.

<sup>73</sup> Forbes, *Ras Mala*, p. 359.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 360.

protection to the country.’<sup>75</sup> The British administration was clearly contrasted to previous regimes by Forbes, both Muslim and Maratha. In spite of this, it is not possible to perceive a partial stance on the part of Forbes supporting the colonial regime openly, but the allusion to a pre-British chaotic situation enhances the positive status of the colonial rule. The plight of some cities in Gujarat is clear when we are told how the British ‘were long urgent with the Peshwah to assist them in restoring order in Surat, the affairs of which had during the weakness of the imperial government fallen into a state of confusion, and in establishing their privileges and trade in that city on a secure footing.’<sup>76</sup> The allusion to Surat’s raiding by Shivaji is apparent, and the British were supposed to be most welcome for having protected Gujarati merchants from the Maratha warrior. Following James Forbes, a civil servant, who narrated the defeat of the Marathas by the British in his *Oriental Memoirs*, Alexander Forbes drew the attention to the people’s reaction at a possible change of British administration in Bharuch. He states that:

...no prayers, no ceremonies, no sacrifices, were left unperformed by the different castes and religious professions, to implore the continuance of the British government. It is with extreme satisfaction I recollect the unfeigned sorrow which pervaded all ranks of society when the fatal day was fixed for our departure. Broach, before its conquest by the English, had belonged to the Mogul, and was governed by a Mohummedan nowaub: the inhabitants well knew the difference that awaited them.<sup>77</sup>

In this way, the reaction of the inhabitants of Bharuch was supposed to show what British rule meant to the people of India at a general level, namely a benevolent and mild form of government as compared with the cruelty and looting attributed to the Marathas or the arbitrary exactions of Muslim rulers. The Marathas were in many respects judged more harshly by Forbes:

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 360.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 366.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 372.

Of all the oriental despots, the arbitrary power of the Mahratta falls, perhaps, with the most oppressive weight; they extort money by every kind of vexatious cruelty, without supporting commerce, agriculture, and the usual sources of wealth and prosperity in well-governed states. The Mohummedans, although usually fond of money, spend it with more liberality, encourage useful and ornamental works, and patronize art and science...”<sup>78</sup>

As Riho Isaka has noticed for Gujarati writers of the end of the nineteenth century the memory of the raids on Gujarat by the Marathas was relatively recent and painful, a fact which led them to be more resentful of the Marathas than the Muslim rulers.<sup>79</sup> The Maratha rule in Gujarat was still remembered as a dark period at that time. This all underwent a change in the twentieth century as Gujarati writers started to consider the Marathas to be heroic, given their supposedly valiant struggle against Muslim rule. In this way, Shivaji, the popular Maratha leader, became the iconic hero for many supporters of Hindu nationalism.

However whether considering Muslims or Marathas in good or bad terms, there was the notion of a positive British period which was more than appreciated by some Gujarati *literati* such as Edalji Dosabhai and Ichcharam Desai. The following section of this chapter will examine the ideas of these two writers.

Edalji Dosabhai and Ichcharam Desai’s regional representations

The period that witnessed the production of histories such as Dosabhai’s *History of Gujarat from the earliest period to the present time* (1894) was marked by ‘the want of a connected History of the province of Gujarát’<sup>80</sup>. This followed the pattern of the histories of

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 372.

<sup>79</sup> Riho Isaka, ‘Writings of History’, p. 161

<sup>80</sup> Edalji Dosabhai, *A History of Gujarat from the Earliest Period to the Present Time*, (reprint, 1986, of orig. edn, New Delhi, 1894). p. I.

Gujarat produced in English in the course of the nineteenth century.<sup>81</sup> It relied heavily, for example, on Forbes' *Ras Mala*; Bird's translations of the *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*; E.C. Bayley's *Local Muhammadan Dynasties of Gujarat*; J.W. Watson's *History of Gujarat*; Grant Duff's *History of the Marathas*; Sir William Hunter's *Indian empire*; Tod's *Rajasthan*; Dutt's *Ancient India*; Eliot's *Rulers of Baroda*; Elphinstone's *History of Gujarat*, and several volumes of the Bombay Gazetteer as well as administration reports.<sup>82</sup>

Following their lead, Dosabhai speaks of a Hindu period that was followed by a Muslim period. His general assessment of the Hindu period is positive, being one in which 'the internal condition of the people of Gujarát, including Sauráshtra, appears, on the whole, to have been prosperous.'<sup>83</sup> And again Dosabhai's account conveys the idea that this prosperity was terminated by a Muslim warrior, Alaf-Khán, sent by Alá-ud-din Khilji, for the reconquest of Gujarat, by 'plundering and laying waste the country'<sup>84</sup> and causing all the possible misfortunes to the last Vághelá king ruling Gujarat. But even if there were wars among Hindu rajas, 'measures conducive to the prosperity of the inhabitants had not been neglected'.<sup>85</sup> Thus it was only with the conquest of Islam that Gujarat saw their prosperity disturbed. Then the pertinent question here is what the portrait of Islam is according to this account and how it matches the contemporary historical imagination of Gujarati and colonial authors.

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<sup>81</sup> Riho Isaka, 'The Construction of Gujarati Identity', p. 4867.

<sup>82</sup> Edalji Dosabhai, *A History of Gujarat*, p. III.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

It is important to mention the Parsi origin of the writer, since this fact influenced the role of Muslims he attributed to them in the narration. There is an empathic feeling because the Parsis had to leave their land in Persia due to the Muslim invasions there. Then ‘in consequence of the fierce religious persecution that ensued, during which many of the Iránians accepted the Muhammadan faith, the greater portion of those who still clung to their own religion felt they could preserve it only by quitting their beloved native land.’<sup>86</sup> In terms of religious affiliations Dosabhai made clear that there was freedom during the Hindu period ‘except in the time of some intolerant prince, there does not seem to have been much religious persecution’.<sup>87</sup>

According to this perspective, a narrative emphasizing a religious dimension in the encounter of the subcontinent’s inhabitants with the different groups of newcomers (Arabs, Afghans, Turks) is repeated in the different accounts we have approached. Dosabhai’s is not an exception and Mahmud’s expedition to Somnath is again depicted as intended to ‘strike a heavy blow at idolatry’.<sup>88</sup> The epic tells that ‘the Hindus collected in large numbers, and made a bold stand in defense of their religion’.<sup>89</sup> Hindus, in Dosabhai’s view, were unable to resist Islam. The essentialization of a Hindu community given to more spiritual matters is articulated anew.<sup>90</sup> There is the idea that Hindus had nothing to do but pray to their gods for help and salvation. Then ‘instead of remaining firm at the ramparts they crowded into the precincts of the temple, and prostrating themselves with tears in their eyes before the idol

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>90</sup> As mentioned above, Forbes in his *Ras Mala* conveyed the idea of Hindus as fond of contemplation and thus unprepared for war-like activities.

implored its aid.’<sup>91</sup> This way of portraying Hindus was not exclusive of Edalji Dosabhai; other authors, not only from Gujarat, propagated this idea as well, highlighting the inaction of Hindus in confronting Muslims. They stressed ‘the centuries of Hindu helplessness’ [because] ‘whether today or eight hundred years ago, the Hindus never fought the Mussalmans without being provoked. It was Mussalmans like Mahmud Ghazanavi, Muhammad Ghori, Aurangzeb, Nadir Shah and other who harassed Hindus endlessly in earlier times.’<sup>92</sup>

However, one of the main aspects to notice in Edalji’s work is that there are no simplistic generalizations when dealing with the administrations of Muslim rulers. On the contrary, there is space in the account to narrate the oppressive regimes, such as Sultan Muhammad III’s (the Gujarat sultan known as Mahmud Bigara) who in the sixteenth century tried to extirpate Rajputs and Kolis from Malwa and that allowed ‘no Hindu... to ride through the city or to dress himself in fine clothes; even the observance of the Diváli and Holi festivals was prohibited’. And he was so abhorred that ‘when he was assassinated by his own Muhammadan servant, the Garásias made a stone image of the murderer, and worshipped it as that of their deliverer.’<sup>93</sup>

In contrast, the Parsi author articulated, as well, the opposite depiction when referring to other Muslim rulers such as the founder of the Muhammadan Sultanat of Gujarat who passed away ‘after a just and wise reign of eighteen years’<sup>94</sup> or when there is the reference to ‘the great Akbar’ during which period ‘Hindus and Muhammadans were, for the first time

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<sup>91</sup> Edalji Dosabhai, *A History of Gujarat*, p. 20.

<sup>92</sup> *Bharatendu*, cited in Sudhir Chandra, *The Oppressive Present*, p. 133.

<sup>93</sup> Edalji Dosabhai, *A History of Gujarat*, p. 128.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.



during the Moslem ascendancy in India, treated impartially'.<sup>95</sup> Dosabhai's history tells of the urban works built by some Muslim rulers that were not intended to be useful only for Muslim subjects (such as mosques); he records a notion of public welfare translated in the building of 'fine broad streets and...noble edifices... With a view to secure an adequate supply of water for the inhabitants, the Sultán diverted the course of the river Háthmati so as to make its waters flow into the Sábarmati.'<sup>96</sup> These Muslim rulers, sultans and mughals, compare favorably with the Marathas, under whom 'the country became a scene of anarchy and confusion'.<sup>97</sup>

It is clear that a notion of public welfare was a prime aspect to measure the benevolence and efficiency of a given administration. In this sense, if some Muslim regimes were considered to be constructive according to the benefits they brought to their subjects, the British administration was appreciated even more in these terms. Dosabhai followed authors like Forbes in stressing the benevolent motives of the British, and made it a point to denounce a popular prejudice against the British that their main motive was to enrich themselves to the detriment of the Indian subjects. His history was published soon after the foundation of the Indian National Congress in 1885, when the drain of wealth theory was circulating widely in the political sphere. In 1895, a year later after the publication of Dosabhai's work, Dadabhai Naoroji, three times president of the Congress attempted to explain India's plight by pointing out that the richness of the country was taken away by the British to the metropolis and suggested that the Indianisation of the civil service that 'will go

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 162.

far to settle the problem of the poverty of Indian people.’<sup>98</sup> The drain of wealth theory reflected in the period’s writings and authors, for instance, Ichcharam Desai disapproved and criticized the British regime for taking the richness of India to Britain. We will come back to this author later.

Edalji Dosabhai was an enthusiastic supporter of colonial administration. His assessment of the British presence in the subcontinent was absolutely positive and optimistic. The last part of his work reveals not only his pro-British stance but his gratitude for the imperial enterprise. The reformist attitude of the official administrators in different cultural matters was more than welcome by the Gujarati author. An illustration of this is the writer’s approval of the British interventionism in the case of *sati* or the burning of the widow. He considered that ‘peace abroad and tranquility at home [were] the mottoes of the British Government in India.’<sup>99</sup> In his perspective, before the British regime, the Gujarati population had been victims of the horrors of civil war and foreign invasions that had brought with it ‘irregular arbitrary taxation, forced labour, uncertainty of possession, religious persecution, plundering, extortion, torture and murder, these were too frequently the characteristics of the rule of the Muhamadans and the Maráthás.’<sup>100</sup> He argued that although

...no Government can be accounted perfect... the thoughtful man, who compares the history of India and of Gujarát in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries with that of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and who reads his history in a manly and truth-seeking spirit, will acknowledge that the principles under which he is now ruled are principles based on a high morality, a strict adherence to justice, and an honourable endeavour to promote the happiness and prosperity of the people. Nor will he escape the conviction that any change in the conditions of rule in India will

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<sup>98</sup> Banerjea, cited in Sanjay Seth, “Rewriting Histories of Nationalism: The Politics of “Moderate Nationalism” in India, 1870-1905”, *The American Historical Review*, 104, (1999). p. 101.

<sup>99</sup> Edalji Dosabhai, *A History of Gujarat*, p. 309.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 309.

assuredly restore the anarchy, the ruin and the desolation from which the country has been delivered by the British rule.<sup>101</sup>

For him, the British presence in India had proved to be almost entirely providential and a cause for celebration.

In a contrasting position, Ichharam Suryaram Desai (1853-1912), born in the city of Surat, south Gujarat, was more condemnatory of the colonial regime, a fact that aroused heated discussions about his challenging writings. Desai pointed out a greedy aspect of colonial administration and by contrast offered a sort of positive representation of Islam in India, although at the end, his final appraisal of the colonial rule is a positive one but only after having revealed several deficiencies with this regime. Ichcharam Desai's publications were particularly controversial in a period of growing tension between different sectors of Indian society and the colonial government, when demands were being voiced for greater political representation for Indians, and when attempts were being made to revitalize Indian culture and traditions. The author's city, Surat, had a long culture of resistance to what was perceived as unfair measures by the government, for instance, there was a protest against the British-imposed salt tax in 1844, against the new weights and measures in 1860, and to the income tax in 1860.<sup>102</sup> Having grown up in this context, Ichcharam fed up from this contextual tradition.

His monthly *Swatantrata* (independence), started in January 1878, showed his spirit of resistance and taste for controversy with an open call for cultural nationalism and his criticism of the licence tax, a fact which caused the monthly to be banned by the

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 310.

<sup>102</sup> *Source Material for a History of the Freedom Movement in India, (Collected from the Bombay Government Records)*, (Bombay, 1957), I, pp. 1-22.

government.<sup>103</sup> In this journal, his *Hind ane Britannia* started to be circulated. This work – called by some scholars as the first patriotic novel of Gujarat and called by the author himself ‘the first political novel in Gujarati’ – also created controversy when it was first published in 1886, since it was considered as including ‘treasonable content’.<sup>104</sup>

*Hind ane Britannia* appears at a first sight to be a criticism of the British regime in India, and indeed, there are many aspects of colonial rule that are questioned in this novel. The author explained that he had written this text, ‘during the lustrum from 1876 to 1880 [when] the country passed through a great political upheaval. The same happened in 1883 when the Black and White Skins grew warm and excited. It then occurred to me to give in detail the merits and demerits of both parties *i.e.* Hind and Britannia, or Natives and Anglo-Indians.’<sup>105</sup>

However, the fact that it was dedicated to Lord Ripon (1880-1884) rather expressed gratitude to British administration, a political stance that can be understood given the previous autocratic administration of Lord Lytton (1876-1880). In addition, the conclusion of the novel emphasized this gratitude and included a feeling of admiration for the colonial machinery. As stated, Desai’s work follows a different narrative form; it is not history but fiction. This fact allowed the author more narrative freedom to express his ideological views without being totally at risk of being censured thanks to the characters’ mediation. However, the bold language of the novel and the kind of remarks the author made were hardly temperate, and because of this his ideas were broadly criticized and/or admired. And even if

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<sup>103</sup> R.L Raval, ‘Cultural Perspectives of the emerging nationalism in the nineteenth century Gujarat’ in Makrand Mehta (ed), *The Regional Roots of Indian Nationalism*, (New Delhi, 1990). p.19.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>105</sup> Ichharam Desai, *Hind ane Britannia*, (Bombay, 1925), p. 7.

there seems to be a paradoxical position while praising and criticizing the British administration at a same time, we have to bear in mind that these contradictory stances were commonplace during this period. Thus it was possible to be both a supporter and a detractor of colonialism, as it is clearly revealed in the political position of the Indian Congress which might be characterized both as nationalist and loyalist in its early years.

In this way *Hind ane Britannia* undertook a resounding criticism against the colonial administration expressed through the central characters in the story. These are Hind Devi, Britannia and Swatantrata, that is to say, the personification of India, England and liberty or independence. The first two characters have a discussion about the impact of England on India. Hind Devi is deeply critical of Britannia's role, thus the latter's arguments contest Hind's persistent criticisms. One of the most interesting points of this patriotic novel is Hind's complaint of the plight of the country and the idea that Britannia is to be blamed for this miserable condition. The most striking aspect of this is that, surprisingly, it is not the Muslim rulers who are the main villains in this allegorical drama, the ones that supposedly obliterated the Hindu glory as we have seen in other works whether intending to sing the glory of Islam or to condemn its conquest and proselytising activities. In the case of this work, the Prophet's religion and its followers are portrayed in a fashion underlining their adoption of India as their country.

As it has been stated, a drain of wealth theory was circulating in the political circles, which made reference to India's riches being taken away by the colonialists which caused Indian subjects to live in poverty. This was a criticism coming from the recently formed Indian National Congress in 1885, that is to say, only a year before the publication of *Hind ane Britannia*. Ichharam's work showed itself to be supportive of this theory. This is revealed

in Hind's arguments on Britannia becoming wealthier and richer to the detriment of Indian subjects.

In one of the opening scenes, a character called *Deshhit* or national interest, asks Hind Devi what has happened to the past glory of the country. Hind's reply is quite eloquent in showing her perception of Britannia:

Britannia has seized everything who yet boasts that she has blessed the sons of Hind. Blessed??!! Her education has left us visionless, they have seized our arms and ammunition...they have retained our princely states but made them powerless...degraded us to beasts...said to us that we are not worthy of freedom...they import cloth and cotton for their Manchester and in order to loot us permitted the sale of their ready-made Manchester-made clothes in me. Promised to develop trade but instead destroyed it. They have left local industries and labour completely destroyed.<sup>106</sup>

It is not only the elaboration of Britannia as having exploited the country and his inhabitants, there is also the idea of India's vulnerability at Britannia's hands. To explain this condition, Desai deploys the essentializing notion of India as a weak entity that is a perennial victim of the invaders' aggression because Indians 'are helpless and weaponless'.<sup>107</sup> As Romila Thapar has referred to in her discussion of depictions of the looting of Somnath, there are some formulaic descriptions for referring this kind of events, for instance, in terms of the casualty figures or to deal with the potential of Muslims to convert forcefully cities into Islam. In this case, there is a sort of standardized depiction in describing Indians and invaders with antithetic adjectives, the former always as weak and victims and the invaders always as stronger and more virile whether if the second ones are Arabs, Afghans, Turks or in this case, British, the descriptive antithesis became a narrative device.

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 6-7.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 9

On the other hand, *Hind Devi* prefigures arguments rearticulated later in Gandhian nationalism about the devastation of Indian industries because of colonial domination of the Indian market. Some sections in the novel refer to this topic by providing certain details about domestic industries. A footnote in the work stated that: ‘The three principal industries under native rule were cotton weaving, salt making, and spirit-distilling. Of these, the first has been crippled by Manchester competition; *the second had been annihilated it so far as legislation can annihilate it and the occupation of a numerous caste destroyed* [emphasis in the original]... The salt manufacture having been crushed, £400,000 worth of salt is imported annually.’<sup>108</sup> The theme is of the destruction of Indian industries and the impoverishment of Indian people and an inverted but parallel process of the metropolis becoming rich. This view was in wide circulation at this time, and had become embedded in the Gujarati consciousness. Such views had indeed been voiced as far back as 1851 by Dalpatram Dahyabhai in a poem called ‘Hunnar Khan in Chadhai (the invasion of Hunnarkhan)’, which was informed by a certain spirit of *swadeshi*.<sup>109</sup> This reflected on how ‘King Industry’, that is, British industrial manufacture, had had a profound influence on India. It is in this context that we can better appreciate A. K. Forbes’ strictures on ‘a thousand unfounded prejudices, and unsupported calumnies, against the English... Among the many who occupy eminent stations in India, some, no doubt, deserve censure... the temptations of wealth and power sometimes subdue the strongest minds... The general opprobrium was unjust on a set of men whose prevailing characteristics were philanthropy, generosity, and benevolence.’<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> “The Garden of India”, cited in *ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>109</sup> Kunjlata N. Shah, ‘Hind ane Britannia. The first patriotic novel in Gujarati language’, in Makrand Mehta, *The regional roots*, p. 32.

<sup>110</sup> Alexander Forbes, *Ras Mala*, p. 373.

Therefore, Hind Devi's accusations voiced ideas and debates that were already circulating in the public sphere.

Desai indeed sets out the counters by Britannia to Hind's allegations, which emphasize the benefits that colonial rule had brought with it: religious freedom, education, freedom of press, peace, prosperous industries and the eradication of what Britannia called 'curses – thugs, sati system, child infanticide, abortion and other evil rituals'.<sup>111</sup> Britannia vehemently asks Hind 'where is in our rule – the Mughal tyranny or the Marathas looting villages incessantly? Haven't you heard your sons saying: "we are completely at peace under the rule of Britannia?"',<sup>112</sup>

On her part, Hind considers that even if Britannia's arguments are true and there are in fact, benefits brought to India, there are self-interested motivations beneath these improvements. In terms of education, for example, Hind argues that Britannia 'established schools to [*sic*] educating [her] sons but there is selfish motive in it. You liked to make my sons forget their motherland, consider you worthy of worship, sing hymns for you, curse me, find faults with me, and sing for you : " long live the victorious rule of Britannia"'.<sup>113</sup>

And as for the Maratha and Mughal rules, the argument provided by Hind Devi goes beyond the ordinary conceptions of these regimes. 'You talk about Maratha and Mughals. But the riches were not taken to another region. Whereas today the loots are no more, how much money, through indirect ways, is being collected and sent abroad? Are taxes less?'<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Ichharam Desai, *Hind and Britannia*, p. 23-24.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. p. 29



In this, Ichharam Desai does not subscribe to stereotypes about the evils of Muslim rule in India and particularly Gujarat. With a quite bold language he was able to question the benevolent aspects of colonial rule in the subcontinent referring how the Muslim rulers came to Gujarat to settle there and created a common culture with Hindu inhabitants. Although at the end, Hind makes clear that ‘the only difference [between British and Mughals] is that they made [India] their dwelling-place, built forts here and became permanent residents’.<sup>115</sup> This way Hind is not supportive of the orthodox vision of Islam and moreover is quite critical of the traditional depiction of Muslims as invaders conquering and looting cities and converting Hindus into Islam forcefully. Their arrival, by contrast, was seen as the creation of a cultural syncretism intermingling Hindu and Islamic characteristics. This suggests Ichcharam was echoing an Indian secular nationalist sentiment, rather than a specifically Gujarati and communal one which shows that understanding of Indian history were being contested, so that the late nineteenth century was a period of fluidity when different interpretations were being put forward without any strong consensus emerging. The consensus came later in the early twentieth century.

As for the British administrators, their role is explicitly emphasized as transgressor while their attempt was at dislocating Indian culture through colonial institutions such as education that was expected to transform the political culture and the rituals and customs in India considered being backward. This landscape offered by Ichharam led his novel to be severely scrutinized in British circles to elucidate if it was disrespectful and disloyal to the British regime, and after much controversy, it was finally exonerated.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>116</sup> Kunjlata N. Shah, ‘Hind ane Britannia. The first patriotic novel...’, p. 35-36

However, following the purpose stated in the preface to the work about pointing out the virtues and vices of Britain and India, Ichharam did not consider Britannia as the only target worth being criticized, Hind Devi is also self-critical when describing his sons in terms of confronting the foreign regimes. Thus we are told that ‘Hindus are of stable disposition, meditative and prudent, mostly coward at the battlefield, having no patriotism, crushed under the burden of race and caste system, half-civilized, sceptical regarding religion and overtly control on their women’.<sup>117</sup> Even though it is Hind Devi speaking, these arguments are reciprocated by the very author, Ichharam, who stated in his preface to the work that

‘the Indian Aryan is typically representative of passive inaction and therefore India’s best interest in abiding her time and seeing what happens, while keeping herself entirely dependent on Divine dispensation. And it was with the same noble intent that when Hind, the heroine of this novel, desired to be free of Britannia, the prudent and far-seeing Goddess Liberty, dissuaded Hind from even the thought of it.’<sup>118</sup>

Britannia, on her part, appropriates these arguments which provide the justification to ardently defend her presence in India. This way Britannia also undertakes a vehement questioning of Hind following Hind’s previous elaborations about her own sons and their defensive strategies not only to confront Britannia but Muslim invaders: ‘When Ghoris attacked you, where was the unity amongst your subjects? Why only kshatriya fought?... the lack of unity and petty quarrels among you is the cause of your present pitiable condition...you forgot your competence while dreaming about the tales of Ramayan and Mahabharata...you should have thought about military competence. Your military ‘force’ was just illusionary.’<sup>119</sup> Therefore, Hind is severely criticized in what is supposed to be her

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<sup>117</sup> Ichharam Desai, *Hind and Britannia*, p. 37.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

inaction and disunity. There is also an essentialization, depicting Indians as concerned only with non-mundane questions and fantasizing about their great epics.

By contrast, Britannia considers herself as an example to follow in terms of defensive activities: 'my military 'force' lies in enhancement of education, research in arts, expansion of trade, rules, determination and policy, time and energy and in my constitution which is invincible by you.'<sup>120</sup> Moreover, Britannia keeps preaching Hind about

the war policy narrated in Ramayana [that] is totally useless in our age. Which is fiction can never become truth... Where was thy 'mighty' war tactics when Ghazni attacked Somnath? Where were those ancient weapons of mass destruction? When I came to conquer you, your sentries and warriors, in glaring garbs with crowns on their heads and swords in hands came to fight but were eliminated in moments with our fatal sniper rifle [*sic*] thus you became slave to those who reside five thousand miles far in England.<sup>121</sup>

At this point, the novel changes its direction and from a strong criticism against Britannia, Hind becomes the target. She is discursively defeated and accepts the criticism inflicted by Britannia. Thus the reversal is complete and Hind's mistakes and weaknesses are openly pointed out. In this sense, the final scene of the novel witnesses the arrival of another important character, Freedom, that having listened to the arguments of both figures is about to give her judgment. She accuses Hind of being incapable of rule and Hind pleads to put her under French, American or German rule, except the rule of Britannia.<sup>122</sup>

However, Freedom continues and tells Hind that it's better for her to be under the British rule unless other foreign 'vultures' tear her to pieces.<sup>123</sup> Moreover, so as to leave no doubt about Ichharam's loyalty, another figure appears. As a heavenly vision 'a divine man

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 48-49.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 162-163.

seated on divine seat'<sup>124</sup> comes into scene; it is Lord Ripon to whom the novel was dedicated. And before him, Freedom asks both female figures to embrace each other.

Thus, even if there is a persistent criticism of Britannia through the whole novel, there is a message of loyalty for Britain. As Ichharam Desai stated in the preface, the idea was showing both vices and virtues of India and Britain. However, even if Desai was successful in conveying this, and deep remarks against England were incorporated, at the end, Britannia emerges as the vanquisher and the author trusts that it is better to be under British rule in spite of her faults and mistakes.

This way the literature of this period –both history and fiction— records a progression in the representation of Islam in India in increasingly negative terms. However it is a fluctuating image in which the authors still acknowledged the benefits of Muslim rules in the subcontinent even if being widely judgemental when appraising their achievements. But these depictions cannot compete in disapproval with the pessimistic image of Islam that twentieth century writers and politicians articulated.

In addition, the broad circulation of these representations must be pointed out. There was a conscious effort to articulate and project the cultural and communitarian identities in a particular way and with a clear intentionality of spreading these ideas. In this sense, these representations proved to be influential in the understanding of the different sectors of society whenever the authors themselves attempted at circulating their shaped ideas in a more or less open way, the authors intended to express forms of thinking and outline the social consciousness of their readers. Although from an elite, these authors were reaching out to a wider readership. Govardhanram consciously wrote his master work, *Saraswatichandra*, in

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 163.

the form of fiction because a story of this kind was more appealing to common people than other kind of writing. Later, K.M. Munshi argued for the pedagogical importance of a 'dominant minority' to which he belonged. In the same way, Ichharam Desai chose to tell his *Hindane Brittania* as an allegory so as to reach a wider audience and be understood by a more diverse section of the population.

In the following chapters we shall go on to examine the way in which a sense of Gujarati identity was developed that became increasingly hostile to the cultural and religious other. Hindu publicists of the ensuing period reformulated the premises of the previous actors in a way that created a more recalcitrant image of Islam in India. At the same time, they were trying to mobilize much wider sections of the population in support of the nationalist movement against British rule. The Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha were two organizations that sought to do this, and they form of subjects of the next two chapters.

## Chapter two

### Arya Samajist ideology and activism in Gujarat

The Arya Samaj as a proselytizing Hindu organization was founded in 1875 by the Gujarati reformer Dayananda Saraswati and it proved to be deeply influential in the Punjab but its influence was not limited to this region. Although the Punjab phase was formative and fundamental for the consolidation of this organization we need to analyze the role of the Arya Samaj beyond the boundaries of that state. In this sense, this chapter will study Gujarat and the Arya Samaj's impact on the development of communal ideology and activities within the Hindu and Muslim communities in the region. In examining this we will see its close links and common agenda with other Hindu nationalist organizations like the Hindu Mahasabha and also the appeal of this organization on some Congress members actively working within its ranks. By analyzing this we will also attempt to shed light on the way political lines are intricate and not perfectly delineated since they permeate each other with different ideological dimensions. Thus, the major political school, that is, the Congress that stood for a political platform supposedly opposed to the Mahasabha and the Arya Samaj, made possible for Congress politicians to look at and support other stances different than the party's which even created conflict with the Congress's declared ideology of moderation and inclusion of the several sectors integrating Indian society. Then when scrutinizing this organization one of the main issues is evaluating it whether as anti-colonialist, anti-Christian or anti-Muslim but the complexity here is that, to some extent, it was everything at different stages and a fundamental aspect is looking at the way these changes of focus took place.

In this sense, the particular aspect to deal with in this chapter is the fluctuating stance and ideology the Arya Samaj developed during its actuation in this crucial period. The first phase from 1875 to the 1920's can be considered as an effort at rationalizing Hindu religion by contrasting it with Christianity, which was by then the main target of the Samajist campaigns when preaching Arya religion. But Christian missionaries were at this time both a target and an example to follow particularly in their proselytizing methods and in their philanthropic activities. In spite of its attack on Christianity, the Samaj clearly remained loyal to the crown and considered the British rule to be merciful and just.<sup>1</sup> In a second juncture, a hostile process of politization of religion can be traced, developed in consonance with the activities of the Hindu Mahasabha, an institution that shared the stance of the Arya Samaj. Both organizations united after 1923 in their campaigning against their new target, the Muslim community that had, in turn, hard-edged their stance in attempting to defend the tenets of Islam for their community which were supposedly at risk with the abolition of the Khilafat and the increasing Hindu activism in India.

But these schematic stages, rationalization of religion and religious politization, coalesce with the understanding of the Arya Samaj in Gujarat in the light of two different moments<sup>2</sup>: one, the period of expansion of Christianity in Gujarat through the conversion of groups of untouchables and secondly, as a reaction before what was considered Muslim aggression in the

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<sup>1</sup> Translation of the resolution of the Arya Samaj Conference held at Itola and of covering letter from the Secretary disowning any connection of the said Samaj with political and seditious movements in India dated 17 May 1910. Arya Samaj, Confidential Documents (from now on CD), file 36/17, p. 93. Baroda Records Office, Vadodara, Gujarat. From now on BRO (VG)

<sup>2</sup> David Hardiman has studied the role of the Arya Samaj in Baroda during the ruling context of Maharaja Sayajirao and he draws the attention to these junctures in the way the Arya Samaj operated in Gujarat. See 'Purifying the nation: The Arya Samaj in Gujarat.'

context of the events of the Mapilla rebellion in 1921, that created a scenario of Hinduism in danger before the occurrence of forced conversions of Hindus at the hands of the Muslims of Malabar. Thus, the Samaj displayed its mutability through time and far from remaining attached to Dayananda's initial reformist principle and its rationalizing effort in his agenda for Hinduism, it became a major organization in the development of communal hostilities in the Gujarati region having as a declared foe the Muslim community from the early 1920's.

The Arya Samaj, as referred above, aimed at reorganizing Hinduism and rescuing its very essence from idolatry and superstitious practices according to the founder's perspective. In these first years Dayananda's criticism of Hinduism was his main aim and it provoked several reactions among Hindu sectors. Conversely, his observations on Christianity and Islam were not received in as something negative.<sup>3</sup> As it has been widely discussed in other places, for Dayananda the real Hinduism was the one ruled under Vedic scriptures and precepts, for him the Vedas were the most important authority religiously speaking.<sup>4</sup> However, this focus on the reform of Hinduism did not remain immutable and inward-looking; the turning point for Dayananda was his visit to Calcutta in 1873 where he began considering Hinduism *vis-à-vis* other world religions, mainly Christianity.<sup>5</sup> The Bengali context Dayananda came across provided the idea of Hinduism's superiority and this was later reflected in his *Satyarth Prakash* or Light of

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<sup>3</sup> Kennet W. Jones, *Arya Dharm: Hindu consciousness in 19th-century Punjab*, (Berkeley and London: 1976). p.40.

<sup>4</sup> J.T.F. Jordens, is exhaustive in depicting Dayananda's search for a Hindu cannon. See . *Dayananda Sarasvati: essays on his life and ideas*.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*



Truth where there is a clear antagonistic stance towards Christianity and Islam in contrast to the viewpoint of Hinduism as undeniably superior.<sup>6</sup>

The incipient activity of the Arya Samaj was most successful in the Punjab where conversions into Christianity were taking place creating among Hindus a perspective of Hinduism at risk. However the first Arya Samaj's centres were established in Rajkot and Ahmedabad in Gujarat, but they disappeared because of governmental political activities and lack of support.<sup>7</sup> And it was only after the call of Maharaja Sayajirao, the ruler of Baroda, that the Arya Samaj focused its action also on Gujarat. Sayajirao Gaekwad was an enlightened ruler and had a progressive stance and education was one of the main issues among his interests to such extent that his 'object in sending a number of boys of the more backward castes to Europe has been largely to extend rapidly enlarged ideas and a valuable knowledge among their community'.<sup>8</sup> Sayajirao was a supporter of an educational project extensive to the members of all social orders, even untouchables. This was a point of coincidence with the Arya Samaj. The organization also promoted education for the people from all sectors of society and even girls.

Thus the arrival of the Arya Samajists into Gujarat is directly associated to a didactic task for the uplifting of marginal groups. The coincidence in thought of both Sayajirao and the Arya Samaj made possible a common pedagogical project whose main target would be the untouchables, that is to say, groups of people that had been traditionally neglected and denied education. In this he did not hesitate in extending his support to Aryas

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<sup>6</sup> See Dayananda Saraswati, *Sayarth Prakash. The Light of Truth*, Chiranjiva Bharadwaja, (trans), (Lahore: 1906).

<sup>7</sup> Kenneth Jones, *Arya Dharm*, p. 35.

<sup>8</sup> Maharaja Sayajirao, 'Education of the backward classes in India', in *The East and West*, 1 September 1902, CD, BROC 21, sr. no. 32, daftar 9. BRO (VG).

while the Samaj continue[d] its energetic battle against the tyranny of caste, with its senseless and unpatriotic elevation of the few, and permanent depression of the many; while its labours to remove the obstacles to national progress contained in the gross ignorance and superstition of the masses; while its members preach and practice the rules of life laid down by its great founder; so, long will my interest in its welfare, and sympathy with its endeavours be constant.’<sup>9</sup>

This way the Arya Samaj fitted perfectly well in the Maharaja’s agenda for ‘social enlightenment of the masses’. As an ‘enlightened ruler’, Sayajirao’s approved this work of social uplifting ‘which the missionary zeal of the Arya Samaj ha[d] undertaken.’<sup>10</sup>

But along with Sayajirao’s concern for education there were other factors that encouraged the Maharaja to summon the Arya Samaj and that paved the way for its success in regions of Gujarat like Baroda. The Christian missionary activities and their constant gaining ground propitiated the creation of an atmosphere in which Hinduism was perceived to be in danger, that is to say, the same scenario in which the Arya Samaj thrived in the Punjab. The escalating figures of converts of Hinduism into Christianity activated the alarms among Hindu groups about the very existence of their religion.

In this sense, the incipient activities of the Arya Samaj can only be understood before an increasingly successful proselytisation of Christian missionaries. The beginning of the nineteenth century was crucial in the expansion of Christian faith. In 1813 the trading monopoly of the company was declared to be finished by the British parliament which meant that the missionaries enjoyed more freedom in their proselytizing activities in India in order to undermining Indian

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<sup>9</sup> Speeches delivered by Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad of Baroda. At the Arya Samaj Conference, Ranoli, 26/2/1911, CD, sr. no. 96, daftar 9, pp. 15-16. BRO (VG)

<sup>10</sup> Speeches delivered by Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad of Baroda at the Arya Samaj Conference, Ranoli, 26/2/1911. CD, sr. no. 96, daftar 9, p. 2. BRO (VG).

religions such as Hinduism and Islam. Thus by the end of the nineteenth century the number of Christians in India and in Gujarat was more visible than in previous years.

This fact was evident in the censuses of the period that provided some data relating to the increasing number of Christians in Gujarat in contrast to a reduction in the Hindu population. The censuses of these years showed an important growth of Christian numbers comparatively speaking, for instance, the census of 1883 reports that the percentage of Christians in Gujarat increased 146.32%, conversely, the percentage for Hinduism and Islam only increased 9.60% and 4.23% respectively.<sup>11</sup> But according to the census information, the alarming signals were not given exclusively by the increase of Christian numbers. This increase was supposed to be concomitant with a decrease in Hindu followers. Thus, the census of 1901 reported that ‘present Hindu population falls 27.63%. [And that] this number is greater than the net decrease of population, namely 462,704 or 19.15 percent’.<sup>12</sup> However, according to the census’ superintendent this fact was ‘explained, partly, by classing animistics in Census Report 1891 as Hindus’ and later, reclassifying these groups under other label but also at the end of the nineteenth century there was an important famine that undermined the population and reconfigured the figures. Therefore social catastrophes and taxonomy did have an impact on the demographic statistics. And this latter aspect was very influential in interpreting the figures of

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<sup>11</sup> *Gazetter of Bombay Presidency*, Vol. VII, Baroda, 1883, p. 48.

<sup>12</sup> *Census of India 1901*, vol. XVIII. Baroda, Pt 1, Report, Bombay, 1902, p. 159.

the population and had a place in the discourses of organizations and individuals about a given community in danger.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the proselytizing mission itself other events of a different order propitiated a deeper involvement on the part of the Christian missionaries. The years 1899-1900 underwent a great famine in western India and consequently many children from Gujarat became orphans. Equally in 1896 there had been a famine at the Punjab, and the orphan children were assisted by Christian missionaries, a situation that provided the possibility for conversion. This set the precedent for the measures taken by the Arya Samaj during the occurrence of the famine in Gujarat at the turn of the nineteenth century. In this way, Arya Samajists came from the Punjab to Gujarat in order to 'save' orphan children from the Christian missionaries,<sup>14</sup> but also to carry out the educational project for the masses designed by Sayajirao. According to the Baroda census information, this was the other explanation for the decline of Hindu population since '7,045 souls were taken to the fold of Christianity, by the Missionaries during the famine years, (orphans left uncared were converted and baptised in famine years).'<sup>15</sup> Thus it must be pointed out that missionary activities were important in the process of boosting a counter-reaction of Hindu organizations and institutions before what was considered a 'Christian threat'.<sup>16</sup> This context encouraged Arya Samajists to see Christian religion as the foremost enemy to be defeated, Islam would become a concern later since during this period and until the first decade

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<sup>13</sup> For the census impact on the perception of the population figures see Pradip Kumar Datta, "Dying Hindus", The Production of Hindu Communal Common Sense in Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Bengal', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 28 (1993), pp. 1305-1319. [consulted at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4399871>]

<sup>14</sup> David Hardiman, 'Purifying the nation', p. 44.

<sup>15</sup> *Census of India 1901*, p. 159.

<sup>16</sup> Jordens, *Dayananda Saraswati*, p. 166.

of the twentieth century (1901-1911) according to census officers' information 40,000 Hindus had converted into Islam whereas 120,000 Hindus had become Christians, and most of them were untouchables.<sup>17</sup> The comparison was striking and that explains the initial focus on fighting Christianity but in parallel with a process of rationalizing Hinduism.

The census was not the only information source for spreading the scenario of Hindu population in danger. Beyond figures, other documents elaborated further on this, for example, documents and writings originated within the Arya Samaj also helped in deepening the gap between the different communities. *Bhajans* (devotional songs) and other Arya Samaj publications circulated the idea that Christians and Muslims were plotting against Hindu dharma and the proselytizing activities of these groups were taken as the proof of these intrigues.<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, another issue revealed in the census tables is the growing relevance of the Arya Samaj in Gujarat, the census of 1901 had since then already included a particular category for the Arya classification

The census of 1901, for the first time, returned 50 followers of the Arya Samaj within this State. During the present decade, their number has shown a remarkable increase... [which] is mainly due to the preachings of missionaries from the United Provinces and to the two Arya Samaj Conferences held at Itola and Ramali villages of the Baroda District in 1910 and 1911. Most of the Arya Samajis belong to the Lewa Kanbi or Anavala and Audich Brahman castes, and respect their caste restrictions. In the Census, many of them returned "Hindu" as their religion and "Arya Samaji" as a name of their sect.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Punjab Census Report 1911*, cited in Christophe Jaffrelot, 'Les (Re)conversions à l'hindouisme (1885-1990) : Politisation et diffusion d'une «invention de la tradition»', *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 39, (1994), p. 75.

<sup>18</sup> David Hardiman, 'Purifying the nation', p. 47.

<sup>19</sup> *Census of India 1911*, Vol. XVI, Baroda. Pt I, Bombay, 1911, p. 61. National Archives of India, Delhi. From now on NAI (D).

As for the year of 1911 the figures for the Arya Samajists reached 598 followers in Baroda. This way the Arya Samaj gained ground in Gujarat and from the early date of 1907 the Arya Samaj had already some branches in the region, 'the Suba, Baroda reports that there are at present two Arya Samajas in the District. Of these one is in Baroda City and the other at Itola in Baroda Taluka.'<sup>20</sup> In this regard it is worth noticing that this organization just like other Hindu organizations such as the Hindu Mahasabha, closely linked to Arya Samaj itself, were carefully observed by police officers in their activities. This might tell of the potential of these organizations to mobilize sectors of society.

The composition of the Arya Samaj's supporters in Gujarat has already been studied.<sup>21</sup> Members of the Patidar, Audich Brahman and Anavil Brahman castes were the chief supporters of the Arya Samaj in Gujarat at that time. These were known as 'respectable' castes in Gujarat society. In addition, the Arya Samaj proselytized among the *dheds*, a low caste group that thanks to Christian missionaries had started to demand education, the Arya sect counter-proselytized and interacted with the *dheds* that were rejected by high caste Hindus.<sup>22</sup> This fact showed that even if Arya Samaj focused on erasing caste differences it was not that successful and orthodox Hindus continued to alienate untouchables and low caste groups .

This leads us to appraise the activities developed by the Arya Samaj in Gujarat and their impact on society. As referred before, at a first moment Arya Samajist emphasis was on 'rescuing' children both from famine and orphanhood and also from the 'clutches' of Christian

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<sup>20</sup> Arya Samaj, CD, file no. 36/17, p.11. BRO (VG).

<sup>21</sup> David Hardiman, 'Purifying the nation', pp. 49-52.

<sup>22</sup> David Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat*, p. 65.

missionaries. Christianity was in the final quarter of the nineteenth century Arya Samaj's first concern. Thus we are told how:

Our agents again and again applied personally to the local officers in charge of the famine relief camps, but met with no success, although we have reason to believe that large numbers of Hindu children were, from time to time, handed over to Christian missionaries and by them sent to distant places in India. In Bombay, our agents travelled as far as Surat and Baroda, and tried to arouse the Hindu public to a sense of their duty towards the little ones of their community, who, in their distress, needed their help and sympathy. We have reason to believe that these visits of our agents, and their readiness to take charge of as many children as might be entrusted to them, had their effect; so that although, notwithstanding repeated applications to collectors, commissioners, and other famine officials, and notwithstanding the favourable orders of some among them, we did not succeed in getting any orphans from Bombay, we had the satisfaction of knowing that we had left no stone unturned to prove as useful to Bombay as we could. The reasons for our failure to get children from Government famine relief works need not be set forth in detail, the most important being that the missionaries were everywhere too strong for us.<sup>23</sup>

In facing Christian proselytization, the Arya Samajists were perfectly aware of the powerful Christian structure working for the expansion of its faith. During the Chhapaniyo famine period for instance, Christian missionaries organized comprehensive relief programmes 'which included food-for-work projects, selling grain at pre-famine prices and distribution of free cooked food, clothing and medicine'.<sup>24</sup> They also established orphanages for the victims of the famine in different regions of Gujarat with the result of large scale conversions into Christianity taking place. Many people converted to the religion of their saviors.<sup>25</sup>

But one of the most interesting aspects in undermining Christian activities was a counter-proselytisation movement that reproduced some tactics of the Christian missionaries such as the running of orphanages and the preaching of a religious belief against idolatry and superstition. In

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<sup>23</sup> Lala Lalpat Rai, *The Arya Samaj an Account of its Origins, Doctrines, and Activities with a Biographical Sketch of the Founder*, (London, 1915), p. 215-216.

<sup>24</sup> Achyut Yagnik and Suchitra Sheth, *The Shaping of Modern Gujarat*, p. 138.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

spite of the Arya effort to improve the conditions of orphan children by establishing refuges for them, there was also a clear interest for competing and winning in the race for achieving more converts. If the welfare of the orphans was genuine, the interest in proselytizing and gaining more supporters was also genuine and difficult to hide. And this partial interest in conversion for conversion's sake would become more evident with the attempts at mass conversion of Muslim converts carried out some years later, to such an extent that Muslim leaders pointed out the fact of non-indoctrination and a superficial conversion being developed by Arya activists. However, the Arya Samaj assistance during the famine years is should be underscored since

The cities of Gujarat had money during the Chhapaniya. The textile mills had started about half a century earlier and they were now well established. There were many wealthy people in the cities but it did not occur to any of them to step in to save people dying from hunger. There were religious godmen in Gujarat, who had become rich with the contributions of farmers and poor people yet chhapan bhog was being offered at the Vaishnav havelis and the acharyas continued to enjoy their luxury.

Lakhs of rupees lay in the coffers of the Swaminarayan temples. A good sum was collected at the temple of Shri Ranchhodrai at Dakor. The wealth in the Jain temples multiplied as interest gathered upon interest generated by the fortune there. Yet not one dharmaguru had the good sense to keep alive the starving people by generating some work for them.<sup>26</sup>

Thus the Arya Samaj campaigning was humanitarian as well as proselytizing, in a social context that apparently did not see its own people mobilized to relieve starving people. By the beginning of the twentieth century Baroda was already a thriving Arya Samajist centre; the preachers were sent into towns to convince people of their adhesion to Arya organization or rather to Hindu dharma. By 1911 several ceremonies of reconversion among Christians and Muslims took place in Baroda.<sup>27</sup> This new activism that some scholars consider a 'Hindu invention' of tradition<sup>28</sup>,

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<sup>26</sup> 'Chhapan bhog' was a feast of 56 (*chhapan*) items of food offered to the image of Lord Krishna in a Vaishnavite temple. Bhailalbhai Patel, *Gamdanun Vastav Darshan*, cited in A. Yagnik and S. Sheth, *Ahmedabad: From royal City to Megacity*, (New Delhi, 2011), pp. 183-184.

<sup>27</sup> David Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat*, p. 64.

<sup>28</sup> For a discussion on this topic see Christophe Jaffrelot, 'Les (Re)conversions à l'hindouisme (1885-1990)'.



being an aspect that was supposed inexistent as such in the past, was implemented through the figure and activities of ‘itinerant preachers’ or *upadeshakas* that constituted one of the important members of the Arya Samaj, whose organization was articulated in three groups: sanyasis and sadhus that followed a vow of renunciation; secondly, ‘Pandits, upadeshakas, lecturers, authors, donors, heads of various provincial educational institutions and members of Pratinidhi Sabhas’ and finally, ‘office holders of various local Samajis, heads of local institutions and local donors in each province.’<sup>29</sup>

The message of Arya Samajist upadeshakas dealt with the Arya doctrine of the infallibility of the Vedas and there was also the topic of working for marginal groups and the insertion of untouchables within the Hindu fold. In order to achieve this, their activism also considered the articulation of an educational structure with the establishment of several *gurukuls*, the organization’s schools both for boys and girls. In this, Sayajirao showed his whole support to the institution:

Gentlemen we have also heard much about the Gurukuls; and the necessity of boarding institutions for the training of our youths... my experience is that whether a man be a king or an ordinary being, there is equal necessity for all to separate the children from their parents and educate them under the kind and special care of worthy Gurus... With this object I have already opened a few boarding schools in my State... You must come forth to make these boarding schools useful. If you accept the system of compulsory education, you will soon realize how these Gurukuls are essential for your children.<sup>30</sup>

In addition, the pedagogical effort also crystallized in female education and by the first decade of the twentieth century one hundred schools and also eight *gurukuls* had been established where

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<sup>29</sup> *Census of India 1911*. Vol. XVI, Baroda, Pt. I, Bombay, 1911, p. 85. NAI (D).

<sup>30</sup> Speeches delivered by Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad of Baroda at the Arya Samaj Conference, Ranoli, 26/2/1911. CD, sr. no. 96, daftar 9, p. 3.

Sanskrit, Hindi and modern sciences were being taught.<sup>31</sup> A Sanskrit, Hindi and English library was established as well. And besides the educational scheme, charity activities were also implemented following the example of Christian activism. Thus, apart from the academic centers, the Samaj was also in charge of philanthropic establishments founding ten orphanages ‘for helpless boys and girls’ and also widow homes.<sup>32</sup>

Thus schools, orphanages and refuges for widows are some of the fruits of the Arya Samaj’s activism in Baroda. But it is worthwhile inquiring about the issue of indoctrination in the organization’s agenda.

Reconversion and return, the nature of *shuddhi* in Arya Samaj’s activism

It is possible to presuppose the enabling of an indoctrination process within the organization’s schools, the gurukuls, but there are other factors related to it. The ritual of *shuddhi* is one of these aspects, a quite controversial measure –for reaccepting ex-Hindus into Hinduism— that was re-signified by the Arya Samaj in the context of Christian proselytism. The debate about *shuddhi* within orthodox Hindu groups centered on the point of whether Hinduism had a missionary feature just as other religions such as Christianity and in that sense, if *shuddhi* or the ritual for reconversion into Hinduism also belonged to Hindu tradition or not.<sup>33</sup> According to some scholars *shuddhi* is a tradition within Hinduism<sup>34</sup> and the founder of the organization himself, Dayananda Saraswati also described the ritual in these terms. In the lines of Arya

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<sup>31</sup> *Census of India 1911*. Vol. XVI, Baroda, Pt. I, Bombay, 1911, p. 85. NAI (D).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84-85.

<sup>33</sup> For a typology on the trends of proselytism within Hinduism see J. F. Seunarine, *Reconversion to Hinduism through Shuddhi*, p. 4-5

<sup>34</sup> See *ibid* and Jordens, *Dayananda Saraswati*.

Samaj's explanation, *shuddhi* meant purification, but for the organization's members it had another meaning: reclamation and conversion.<sup>35</sup> In this logic, Dayananda incorporated it into his religious procedures as a practice of his 'Vedic church', although several years later, the new impulse of this measure at the hands of the Arya Samaj along with the Hindu Mahasabha would also generate controversy among other circles such as Muslims. They claimed for them, among other things, the exclusive right to proselytisation as it will later be explored in this chapter.

Another problematic *shuddhi* stood for among orthodox Hindus was its close association or similitude with Christian proselytizing activities and rites. For the founder's critics, Dayananda seemed suspicious since his Arya religion was considered by them as 'a disguised form of Christianity'.<sup>36</sup> In *Satyarth Prakash* or the Light of Truth Dayananda had sought to distance himself from such an attack in his criticism of other samajes, such as the Brahmo Samaj and the Prarthna Samaj, stating that 'the people belonging to these *Samajes* are very much wanting in patriotism, have imitated the Christians in many things, have even altered the rules and regulations governing marriage and eating and drinking with others.'<sup>37</sup> However, the Samaj's own mimicry strategies became indeed a survival tactic and provided the organization with the possibility of staying in the race for proselytization with Christian missionaries.

In addition, Dayananda's criticism of Hinduism itself also provoked heated reactions among certain Hindu groups and wider uncertainties about his belief in Hindu religion to the

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<sup>35</sup> Lala Lajpat Rai, *The Arya Samaj*, p. 220

<sup>36</sup> Hardiman, 'Purifying the nation', p. 43.

<sup>37</sup> Dayananda Saraswati, *Satyarth Prakash*, p. 467.

extent that he was blamed for being supposedly at the service of Christian missionaries.<sup>38</sup>

Beyond the fact of elucidating the point of proselytisation and *shuddhi* being traditional within Hinduism, the most important aspect is the transcendence of *shuddhi* for Hindu proselytisation purposes and the replies to this measure from other social sectors. It was, undoubtedly, a proselytizing campaign that helped to widen the gap between Indian communities, Hindus, Christians and Muslims since as it was clearly stated by one of its most illustrious members, Lajpat Rai, the Arya Samaj 'engages in the work of reclaiming those who have left Hindu society, and it converts everyone who is prepared to accept its religious teachings. In this work it comes into direct conflict with the proselytizing work of the Musulman Mullah and the Christian missionary; the Musulman fanatic and the Christian zealot hate it, but even the sober-minded moulvie and the broadminded Christian do not like it.'<sup>39</sup>

The *shuddhi* ritual was originally a practice applied to Hindus that were believed to have been in polluting contexts, like when travelling abroad.<sup>40</sup> But at the occurrence of more frequent conversions of Hindus into Christianity by the end of the nineteenth century and before Christian altruistic activities that stood for possibility of conversion, Dayananda aimed *shuddhi* at neo-Christians. Most of them had previously belonged to untouchables groups of the population. But it seems that the ritual was not widely utilized by Dayananda. He performed only three *shuddhis* during his lifetime in the Punjab,<sup>41</sup> but many orphans left by the famine were also brought back to Hinduism by other Arya Samajists. Then if this is the case in that period it is worth analyzing

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<sup>38</sup> Jordens, *Dayananda Saraswati*.

<sup>39</sup> Lala Lajpat Rai, *The Arya Samaj*, p. 220-221.

<sup>40</sup> Hardiman, 'Purifying the Nation', p. 43.

<sup>41</sup> Jordens, *Dayananda Saraswati*, p. 174.

the moment and circumstances in which this practice changed its focus to Muslims. This turn in emphasis occurred during the Gandhian era.

The expansion of shuddhi was revitalized at the beginning of the third decade of the twentieth century in the light of the events of the Malabar Coast in 1921 when a number of Hindus were forced to adopt Islam by the Mapillas, a Muslim group, encouraged by the initial success of the Khilafat movement, whose collapse occurred from 1922 onwards. This group of poor and uneducated Muslims proclaimed *swaraj* and ejected the local representatives of the British colonial state and 'their fanaticism turned on the Hindus with massacres, forcible conversions, desecration of temples, rape, pillage, and arson.'<sup>42</sup> After this point, the *shuddhi* campaign was reinforced and aimed mainly at Muslim converts. In 1923 in a meeting of the Hindu Mahasabha, another Hindu organization, explored in chapter three, the All India Shuddhi Sabha was founded with the objective of focusing its effort on bringing particularly convert Muslims back into the Hindu fold. Moreover, in Gujarat, the massive conversion success of the Christian missionaries during the first decade of the twentieth century was not continued in subsequent decades. At this juncture, Christianity no longer seemed such a direct threat.<sup>43</sup>

The emergence of the Shuddhi Sabha within the Hindu Mahasabha marked a common ideology and joint work in Hindu proselytisation and also revealed their close attachment to institutions like the Congress that apparently did not concur with a Hindu nationalist ideology. This was clear in the fact that several Congress members took part both in the party itself and also in the Hindu Mahasabha or the Arya Samaj, such as Madan Mohan Malaviya and Swami

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>43</sup> David Hardiman deals with the stagnation in conversion for Christians by the Church Missionary Society. See *Missionaries and their Medicine: a Christian Modernity for Tribal India* (Manchester and New York: 2008), p. 157.

Shraddhananda respectively. The last one, for instance, demanded funding to the Congress for his *shuddhi* campaign in 1922.<sup>44</sup> In spite of their communion, the Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha pointed out their differences at least in rhetoric. According to them, a basic variance of Hindu nationalist organizations such as the Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha was that the former depicted itself as an exclusively religious institution whereas the second one declared itself to be an all embracing institution that comprehended both the political and the religious spheres of life. These theoretical differences in their nature did not prevent both institutions working hand in hand for fulfilling their own agendas. Thus the Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha launched widely the programme of *shuddhi* and *sangathan* (unity) in 1923.<sup>45</sup> Both projects –*shuddhi* and *sangathan*— symbolized the fear of the militant Hindu community before other religious faiths and their proselytizing and stood for a major attempt by the Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha ‘to reclaim the ‘victims’ and protect the ‘faithful’.’<sup>46</sup>

Gujarat, particularly the city of Baroda, witnessed common campaigning of the two institutions. For instance, the gymnasium of Manekrao in Baroda was a centre where the Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha gathered and organized meetings to promote a Hindu nationalist ideology rather than an anti-colonial struggle. Since 1906 when Manekrao went to Calcutta for an exhibition of his students ‘the fame of the individual and his Gymnasium has

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<sup>44</sup> Hardiman, ‘Purifying the Nation’, p. 55.

<sup>45</sup> Charu Gupta, ‘Articulating Hindu Masculinity and Femininity. ‘Shuddhi’ and ‘Sangathan’ Movements in United Provinces in the 1920’s’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 13 (1998), p. 727.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 729.

spread far and wide so much so that almost all extremists that occasionally visit this capital make it a point to go to the place and some-times deliver lectures on political topics.<sup>47</sup>

However, even if denying a political agenda, the Arya Samaj's political dimension was revealed by the implementation of the referred shuddhi ritual to bring as many converted people as possible within the Hindu fold, both ex-Hindus and others included. As mentioned above the groups particularly aimed at for re-conversion were neo-Christians and neo-Muslims because there was the idea that most of the people in India professing these beliefs had been previously Hindu. Thus 'about the reconversions the Census Commissioner of the United Provinces of Agra and Oude remarks: "Special efforts are directed to the reconversion of converts from Hinduism to Christianity or Islam, while persons who are Christian or Mahomedan by birth are also occasionally converted."<sup>48</sup> The censuses in Gujarat provided not only statistics and figures but a narrative that would be widely circulated and re-elaborated about theoretical massive forced conversions of Hindus at the hands of the Muslims. Thus we are told that 'from time to time Mahomedan missionaries and men of learning coming either of their own accord or invited by the rulers of Gujarat succeeded in winning some Hindus to their faith. But most of the converts were forced to adopt Islam.'<sup>49</sup> But if the census conveyed this particular narrative about forced conversions there is evidence suggesting a peaceful penetration of Islam by itinerant preachers who gained a major figure of converts rather than conversions by force.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Jummadada Gymnastic Institute of Mankekrao, CD, BROC 21, file no 36, p.3. BRO (VG).

<sup>48</sup> Lala Lajpat Rai, *The Arya Samaj*, p.221.

<sup>49</sup> *Census of 1911*. Summary of report, Baroda State, Bombay. 1911, p. 48.

<sup>50</sup> M.A. Quraishi, *Muslim Education and Learning in Gujarat* (Baroda:1972).

In this climate, *shuddhi* ritual gained momentum but it seems that it was rather a 'rite of access' that did not necessarily demand indoctrination or the promotion of a 'new interior life'.<sup>51</sup> The particular Arya Samajist focus on the reconversion of the Malkanas, a Rajput group from the western United Provinces, that preserved several Hindu customs, revealed more specifically an attempt at de-Islamisation of this group.<sup>52</sup> Thus even if *shuddhi* presupposed a conversion or re-conversion act, it can be looked at as a process of Hinduisation,<sup>53</sup> in other words, the emphasis was on the fact that some groups re-adopted predominantly their still existent Hindu customs and traditions and that put aside the Muslim features. Thus the Arya Samaj activities of the second decade of the twentieth century embodied specific anti-Islamic activities instead of spreading Hinduism as a religion with its philosophical and spiritual contents. A superficial conversion without learning and understanding the Hindu precepts appeared to be enough for the Arya Samajis upadeshaks.

This non-indoctrination or easy conversion was at some point noticed by Muslim sectors from Gujarat opposed to *shuddhi* campaign, thus in a meeting of 250 Mohamedans convened at Mandai, Broach City, on February 13 1927, Moulvi Abdul Majid Fidvi delivered a lecture on religion where he stated that 'we have been slaves for the last 150 years since we came in contact with the Hindus. Otherwise Mohamedans ruled for 650 years. The Kshatriyas were converted to Mole Islam about 650 years ago and now the Arya Samajists are trying to turn them into Hindus

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<sup>51</sup> Jordens, *Dayananda Saraswati*, p. 171 and Jordens, cited in Yoginder Sikand and Manjarim Katju, 'Mass Conversions to Hinduism among Indian Muslims'. p. 2219

<sup>52</sup> Yoginder Sikand, 'Mass Conversions to Hinduism'. p. 2216

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 2214.



again by “Shuddhi” i.e. by giving them urine and cow dung only.<sup>54</sup> The Molesalams, had been Rajputs who were converted into Islam in the times of Ahmed Shah in the fifteenth century. He has been considered as an intolerant ruler of Gujarat and founder of Ahmedabad city. ‘He is reported to have suppressed many Rajput chieftains, enforced both salami and jiziya on them and secured a number of converts to Sunni Islam. These converted Rajputs turned into a distinct community called Molesalam and Malek.’<sup>55</sup> These kinds of communities were a good target for Arya proselytism that attempted that Muslim converts long ago converted returned to the Hindu fold.

This particular anti-Islamism produced reactions to Arya Samajist proselytism. As it was declared by one of its members, Lala Lajpat Rai, it produced confrontation both with Christian and Muslim missionaries from the most temperate to the most orthodox. On the other hand, the focus of Arya Samajist on reconverting non-Hindu believers was supported on the premise that any people from a different religion than Hinduism had been a Hindu before their conversion. Thus the reversion through shuddhi was seen by Arya Samajists as a legitimate action to ‘rescue’ their religious peers from the inexorable undermining of Hindu population.

In Baroda particularly, the conversionist wave was enabled through the Arya Kumar Sabha and the Shuddhi Sabha of this city. At the same time a meeting of Arya Samajists and Hindu Mahasabhaites took place to organize a common front embodied in the Gujarat Hindu Sabha to unite all Hindus including untouchable groups. From 1923-1924 the Sabha established

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<sup>54</sup> Extract from the confidential diary of the District Superintendent of Police, Broach, for the week ending February 19, 1927, Information on pamphlets and speeches, Home Department Special Branch (from now on HDSB), file 355 (25) D, p. 45. Maharashtra State Archive, Bombay. From now on MSA (B).

<sup>55</sup> Yagnik and Sheth, *The Shaping of Modern Gujarat*, p. 49.

nineteen schools for untouchables and toured cities in Gujarat undertaking missionary work among Muslim communities that also had Hindu religious practices.<sup>56</sup> This was a common aspect, Muslim converts frequently preserved some Hindu customs but even among the different communities there were several examples either of Hindus or Muslims taking part in the festivities or religious events of their so-called antagonistic community. A number of examples are referred in the official gazetteers and publications:

Vála Rajputs, though not Muhammadans visit *tájiás* or Muharram biers and the tombs of Muhammadan saints and offer them cocoanuts and make them vows. This leaning to Muhammadanism is not peculiar to Valas. Vow-making to the Moharram *tájiás* or biers and to the tombs of Muhammadan saints is common among lower Hindus and is often met with among the higher castes. Besides their own special days the different clans of Rajputs keep all Hindu fasts and fests.<sup>57</sup>

And at the most confrontational moments, the leaders from both communities asked their companions to stop joining the other community's events. Thus this call might show a partial syncretism of some groups but also a daily coexistence and involvement of the communities with the other community's affairs.

In addition, the reaction to Hindu proselytism was Muslim proselytism itself developed through the activism of a Muslim organization, the *Anjuman-i-Islam* aimed at countering Arya Samaj's propaganda. In this atmosphere, Muslim sectors appealed to what they considered to be Islamic tradition, they claimed the right to proselytize since in their opinion 'the Aryasamajists want to turn Mohamedans into Hindus by Shuddhi. It is well-known that big fishes swallow small ones, so a big community may like to swallow the smaller ones, but the Hindus cannot do

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<sup>56</sup> Hardiman, 'Purifying the Nation', p. 56 and Yagnik and Sheth, *The Shaping of Modern Gujarat*, p. 213.

<sup>57</sup> Bhimbháí Kirpárám (comp) and James M. Campbell (ed), *Hindu castes and tribes of Gujarat*, (reprint. 1988 of orig. edn, 2 vols, Bombay, 1901), i, p. 137.

so, as the Vedas do not authorize them to do so. Only the Mohamedan religion lays down that all who are not Mohamedans should be converted to Islam.<sup>58</sup> As we will see, the idea of tradition as sanctioning rituals and performances was broadly circulated and stood for a pillar to claim the right to carry out certain celebrations and practices.

This way the Muslim counter-reaction was crystallized in Islamic proselytism. The Arya Samaj's *shuddhi* confronted with the Muslim *tanzim*, the Islamic version in the propaganda of Muslim conversion.<sup>59</sup> For some Muslim leaders 'the Arya Samaj [was] the principal foe of Islam in India. The Samaj count[ed] its missionaries by the thousands... carrying on a vigorous campaign to pervert Muslims from their faith.'<sup>60</sup> Thus it is hardly unavoidable to see a parallel perspective both in Hindu and Muslim opinions that considered the other community as its nemesis, and claimed for themselves the right to defend from the threat the proselytism of the other was supposed to embody. In Muslim eyes, for instance, it was considered that 'years past Baroda has become a chief centre of the Arya Samajists and the poisonous air of communal friction has come to spread there enough.'<sup>61</sup>

The next section of the chapter will explore in greater detail the Arya Samaj's activities at the second juncture which particularly targeted Muslim community in the promotion of a

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<sup>58</sup> Lecture delivered by Moulvi Abdul Majid Fidvi the 15 February 1927. Extract from the confidential diary of the District Superintendent of Police, Broach, for the week ending February 19, 1927, Information on pamphlets and speeches, HDSB, file 355 (25) D, p. 51. MSA (B).

<sup>59</sup> Senaurine, *Reconversion to Hinduism through Shuddhi*, p. 19.

<sup>60</sup> Durrani, cited in *ibid*, p. 20.

<sup>61</sup> Music before mosques 1932, Huzur Political Office, Political Department (from now on HPOPD) List 4, General dafter 843, file 68. BRO (VG).

militant Hindu nationalism expressed through political and religious discourses; the performance of theatrical representations spreading pejorative stereotypes of Muslims as kidnappers of Hindu girls, for instance, and also the role in the breaking out of communal riots on several occasions when Arya Samajists toured some cities in Gujarat. The idea is to calibrate to what degree these aspects produced the conditions for the increase of communalism in western India and to what extent its effect has been long-lasting in contemporary violent episodes. We will also explore the escalating belligerent activities of Muslim sectors spread through the circulation of pamphlets and the articulation of campaigns inciting to violence and to resist Arya Samaj's activism which also contributed to broaden the gap between Muslims and Hindus.

### Contesting the Samaj: the Anjuman-i-Islam proselytism

As stated above, the first moment of the Arya Samaj embodied an attempt at rationalization of Hinduism. The organization's efforts were aimed at enlightening the Hindu community, but also to 'care for all Hindus who accepted its truth and even for those who did not'.<sup>62</sup> A coercive aspect was somehow implied since taking care of those who did not accept Arya Samaj's truth could become compulsory even if people were unwilling to receive this care and the indoctrination coming with it. In spite of criticizing Christianity as an institution, an imitative feature was evident in this criticism. This required the organization to follow the path started by the missionaries in developing their philanthropic and proselytizing actions. When appraising Christian missionary actions, it was clear that the Arya Samajists did not reject their activities as a whole. They were rather worth to imitate as a vehicle to stay in the competition either for increasing the figures of their respective religions or in a less hopeful scenario, for not losing

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<sup>62</sup> Kenneth Jones, *Arya Dharm*, p. 235.

more people at the hands of the missionaries. The figures of the population became a true obsession for the several communities of the different faiths who wanted to increase their numbers and then their political strength. Thus, the operated change in the Samaj's focus in the early 1920's turned its efforts into an aggressive activism against Islam. As a whole, the Samaj had seen as its contending adversaries both Christianity and Islam intermittently with a major or minor emphasis at different junctures, nevertheless a basic difference was apparent, 'the faith of Christianity as a competing religion was inevitably interwoven with the broader question of Western civilization and its status in the minds of educated Punjabis [and other places elites]. No such ambiguity existed with Islam which possessed all the evils of Christianity and none of its advantages'.<sup>63</sup> In this sense, the archival sources clearly show the Samaj considerations about Christian and Hindu doctrines that by the third decade of the twentieth century presented a revealing conclusion, 'Christ & Krishna were identical and they [Christians and Hindus] were children of the same God'.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, there was no space in a Hindu context for people professing Islam; they were alien to this universe differently to Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists or Jains. This idea was relevant in perceptions about Islam and other later Hindu nationalist figures remained attached to this view of Muslims as permanently foreigners having extraterritorial loyalties far away from India that was not considered by them as their motherland.

Accordingly in the race of proselytization both the Arya Samaj and the Anjuman-i-Islam contested with each other for increasing their religious followers and gaining influence. In a historical context that demanded cultural definition, Muslim sectors also entered these processes,

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 192-193.

<sup>64</sup> Confidential Fortnightly Report for the period ending 25<sup>th</sup> January 1935. Fortnightly confidential reports from 11<sup>th</sup> August 1934 to 31st July 1936. Huzur Political Office, CD, BROC 26, file 26. BRO (VG).

mainly ‘gentry families once associated with top ranks of Mughal administration’.<sup>65</sup> Among Bombay presidency Muslim converts from Hinduism such as Memon, Bohras and Khojas there was a ‘strong sense of corporate identity’.<sup>66</sup> These communities were represented strongly in Gujarat with Bohras and Khojas being Shias and Memons Sunnis Hanafite and they still preserve community identities very well delineated.<sup>67</sup> In this atmosphere and following a reformist line, Kamruddin and Badruddin Tyabji –the former, Bombay’s first solicitor and the second one, barrister— founded the Anjuman-i-Islam in Bombay in 1876, only a year after the Arya Samaj’s foundation which is indicative that both communities were undergoing the same processes and trying to define themselves in cultural terms. The Anjuman had among its objectives to improve the educational and social level of Muslims and to encourage ‘a sense of belonging’ in the community.<sup>68</sup> In Anjuman circle there was also concern about an alleged disunity between Sunnis and Shias, the same way the Samaj pointed out disunity in Hindu community. Therefore one of the main goals of the institution would be to preserve unity regardless of sect. Badruddin who became president of the Congress in 1887 had the perception that

We must remember that we have to deal with a mass of ignorant, bigoted and fanatical population-that instead of finding all the points on which all Mussalmans agreed, they will magnify those on which we are unfortunately divided. Now the great aim of my life has been to cement those discordant elements into one compact mass whose watchword should be ‘Islam’ without any of the later difference.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Shabnum Tejani, *Indian Secularism. A Social and Intellectual History, 1890-1950* (New Delhi: 2007), p. 41.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Muslim Communities of Gujarat. An exploratory study of Bohras, Khojas and Memons*, (Delhi, 1989).

<sup>68</sup> Shabnum Tejani, *Indian Secularism*, p. 42.

<sup>69</sup> Hussain B. Tyabji, *Badruddin Tyabji: A Biography* cited in Yagnik and Sheth, *The Shaping of Modern Gujarat*, p. 203.

Thus if there was a real antagonism between the Samaj and the Anjuman, it is not possible to refer a permanent opposition from the Anjuman's inception. This institution was not always alienated from Hindu community and its foundational objective had been to reaffirm a cultural identity as well as to improve the social conditions of Muslims. In this sense, for instance, its founder, Badruddin believed that the Congress was the means for improving political issues for Muslims.<sup>70</sup> In an early phase even Sayajirao, being a Hindu ruler, attended Anjuman meetings trying to preserve the unity of both communities since as referred, this ruler followed an inclusive policy for all faiths and his call for the Arya Samaj to Gujarat was rather in terms of education than religion, his main concern had been 'to enlighten the masses'. In his speeches at the Anjuman sessions he made an allusion to a peaceful coexistence of the communities stating that 'Mahomedans as soldiers have always come in contact with Sikhs and Marhathas, not necessarily as opposed to each other, but as friends supporting the same cause'.<sup>71</sup> He further elaborated the idea that

We might differ in matters of religion and its tenets, but there are some principles in which Mahomedans, the Hindus and Christians, must all agree by common consent and they are, be just and true and do as much good as lies in your power to your fellow countrymen. The Mahomedans were once as you know a most powerful race, not only in India but a great portion of the world – in Africa and in Europe. Of course we did not then know America, but in the known portions of the world they have played a part in the history of which every man an every Mahomedan have occasion to be proud.<sup>72</sup>

In spite of playing with the stereotype of Muslims as a martial or warrior race conquering many parts of the world, an aspect frequently condemned for India's case in several spheres and at different moments, Sayajirao's speech calibrated this feature in a positive way. Moreover, he

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<sup>70</sup> Yagnik and Sheth, *The Shaping of Modern Gujarat*, p. 204.

<sup>71</sup> Speeches delivered by Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad of Baroda. Speech at Anjuman-e-Islam dated the 3/9/1902, Madras, CD, BRO 21, daftar 9, file 35. BRO (VG).

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

pointed out shared aspects of the different religious creeds by stating that there were common principles among Christians, Muslims and Hindus, an idea totally transformed through time as we have seen before, since the third decade of the twentieth century already witnessed the conception of Christian and Hindus sharing doctrinal principles whereas Muslims were put aside in this spectrum.

Thus at the turn of the twentieth century there were relations cordially developed between these communities in places of Gujarat, notwithstanding there were some episodes of confrontation as well, particularly detonated by the long-lasting issues: claims over religious sites, music before mosques and cow-killing. The gap between the communities was not so wide though. But in the early 1920's there was a different scenario with the failure of the Khilafat movement and the Muslim discontent which resulted in several violent episodes and increasing militancy of the communal organizations.

Previous to this time however, there were, in fact, some serious conflicts between these communities such as the riot of 1893 in a city of Junagadh state but the difference with later confrontations was that there was also conflict with Christian missionaries in this period which means that the emphasis of the Arya Samaj was not particularly put on Muslims as the exclusive problem to cope with. There was a diverted focus that did not consider Muslim proselytism as unique and particularly problematic, in other words, it did not appear to exist quite a pervasive anti-Islamism. For instance, in terms of cow slaughtering even the British were criticized for consuming beef.

I have received information that a large gang of sadhus are travelling through central India to Dwarka. These men are engaged in anti kine killing propagandism. They circulate a letter which is unsigned and its purport is that a very holy man at Dwarka has received in a vision a message



to the effect that every Hindu who sells cows to Englishmen or Mussulmans is doomed to eternal perdition.<sup>73</sup>

Eating beef was at that time an issue considered inimical on its own and it was condemned both in British and Muslim sectors by Hindu segments, but then it became particularized to Muslims who were started to be perceived as evil butchers killing cows in order to hurt Hindu religious feelings. And the colonial authorities on their part considered the cow protection issue as seditious, not only anti-Muslim since it was seen as intended at gathering and uniting Hindu community around it to oppose the colonial regime.<sup>74</sup> But the most important aspect of the communal antagonism of this period is that the involvement of Hindu and Muslim institutions like the Arya Samaj, the Hindu Mahasabha or the Anjuman-i-Islam in detonating the conflicts was not a prominent factor as it became from the 1920's to the 1940's, a period in which the organisations' leaders openly intervened to 'sort out' intercommunal problems in defying terms as we will see later in this chapter and particularly in chapter four of this research.

For instance, the riot of 1893 broke out in Prabhas Patan, Kathiawad, because 'of grave injustice that [wa]s being done to Hindus of Prabhas Pattan... in respect to their religion, sacred traditions and holy places of pilgrimage'.<sup>75</sup> The Hindus declared that the Islamic shrine of Hazarat Pir in Patan had been a Hindu temple in its origin, but the Muslims during their rule managed to exclude Hindus from it and transformed it into a Muslim place. Moreover, in the

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<sup>73</sup> Letter to Hancock dated 4/7/1894 in Poona. Cow Killing agitation Societies and Sabhas etc. 1894. Miscellaneous files IOL: Western India States Agency records dealing with communal incidents. (from now on WISARCI), OIOC R/2/722/64, p. 5. British Library, London. From now on BL (L).

<sup>74</sup> Shabnum Tejani, *Indian Secularism*, p. 49

<sup>75</sup> Letter from the president of the Hindu Dharma Samaj Hitrakshak Samiti dated the 28<sup>th</sup> February 1932. Prabhas Patan Miscellaneous Correspondence, 1932-1938, Huzur Political Office, Revenue Department (from now on HPORD) List 4, file 18, daftar 390. BRO (GV).

premises of the place there was ‘a sacred bathing tank... originally called Rampurshkarji’s kund’ where Hindus were originally allowed to bathe before worshipping a deity in the place but according to Hindus, Muslims had violated this agreement by stopping them from doing so.

It was found on enquiry by the then Political Agent Colonel Lang in the year 1851 A.C. that the Hindus can bathe in it on the great Hindu Holiday of Ramnavmi... on giving some food to the fakir. The same Political Agent disposed of it that year several other disputes in connection with the sacred places in or about Patan between the Mahomedans and the Hindus. But both these sections always complained against each other.<sup>76</sup>

Before such a scenario with Hindus trying to make use of the tank and Muslims trying to prevent it, there were clashes between sectors of these communities who had claimed for themselves the right of having their holy shrines in the place. But the authority’s perspective was that both communities had ‘the emotional propensities... especially... the Mahomedans who are generally noted for their mischievous turn of mind...’<sup>77</sup> Thus communities were depicted by colonial administrators in terms of the essentialization that Hindus were docile and the Muslims more martial and fanatics. And these narratives helped to create opposition and to forge self-identities working on contrasting binary characteristics and in a polarizing spectrum of positive and negative.

On the other hand, in the history of communal confrontations in Gujarat, Prabhas Patan had been particularly pointed out as sensitive to these episodes –whether the issue was a tank, a *dehotsarga* (the place where a god left his mortal remains), cow slaughter or the famous Somnath temple which aroused a huge controversy with the campaign for its reconstruction in

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<sup>76</sup> Reply to a telegram of the 5<sup>th</sup> April 1892 about the Mahomedans of Prabhas Patan from Haridas Vihasidas, Diwan of Junagadh, to Major F. U. Snell, Assistant Poll, Agent, dated the 7<sup>th</sup> April 1892. Patan Riot. Hindus and Mususlmans Patan Commission. Pt I. 1893. Miscellaneous files IOL: WISARCI. OIOC R/2/721/56, p. 7. BL (L).

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

the 1940's, and in this the role of politicians and organisations is unquestionable. The controversies over the Somnath temple, for instance, were finished by its final reconstruction and idol installation in 1951 promoted by K.M. Munshi. The contentious issues related to Prabhas Patan clearly show that it was politicians who did not let the issues calm down. Moreover, the historicity of conflicts between Hindus and Muslims in Prabhas Patan was more exhaustively developed in later narratives by administrators and community's sectors. By contrast, the contemporary accounts were not as detailed as the later ones which emphasize and add more elements to the chain of offences the communities supposedly perpetrated on each other. This demonstrates that the political context in Gujarat in the 20s and the 30s did influence the way stories and histories were projected towards the past both for heroic deeds and for tyrannies. Thus, the more turbulent contexts of 1920s and the 1930s impacted on the way past narratives were being retold. Therefore these narratives were more punctual in referring stories of permanent calamities inflicted by the other community, whether it was Hindu or Muslim, in the history of conflicts in Patan.

While the riot of 1893 produced a deep discontent, the communities managed to cope with their difference. However, it marked a point of departure in the scope a conflict could reach. There was will to sort conflicts out and the manipulation of the communities on the part of the Arya Samaj or the Anjuman to keep opposing the 'antagonist' community was hardly present in comparison. In addition if the communities' leaders sent letters to complain of the state of things they also let the authorities know

That with the co-operation of the leading Hindus and Mahomedans of Prabhas Patan and other places an amicable settlement of all disputes till then existing between these communities was arrived at. The said amicable settlement was embodied in a Gujarati writing duly executed and

signed by 789 leading Hindus and Mahomedans at present in the records of the Juganadh state...<sup>78</sup>

Then there was a less interventionist or provocative stance from the Arya Samaj or other organizations. In this sense, in 1894 just a year later after the riot in Prabhas Patan, the Anjuman-i-Islam of Ahmedabad organized an educational conference. 'More than 500 delegates from twenty-one cities participated. Educationists and members of the Hindu and Parsi elite, and local British officers attended the conference.'<sup>79</sup> A four point programme highlighted 'the need for a greater effort for Muslim education; raising awareness in Muslim society for the promotion of girls' education; cultivation of fraternity among followers of all religions; and discontinuation of extravagant spending on social celebrations.'<sup>80</sup> The belligerency showed later by the Samaj, the Mahasabha or the Anjuman in the 1920s against Hindus and Muslims respectively was rather absent in this period. Instead there was still an attempt at preserving intercommunity relations in good terms on the part of the communities' leaders.

In sharp contrast to 1893, the riots of 1927-1928 in Godhra, Surat and Bombay, in fact, revealed that the community gap had widened. It was an episode whereby the different organizations proved their militancy had increased considerably. By then, the Muslim community was seen as the major problem for Hinduism. Similarly, certain sectors of the Muslim community also perceived some Hindu groups as dangerous for their community. And the offensives coming from the Arya Samaj, the Hindu Mahasabha and the Anjuman-i-Islam

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<sup>78</sup> Petition of Tribhovandas Vurjeeewandas and 1101 other leading members of the Hindu community addressed to the administrator of Juganadh State, dated in Bombay the 1<sup>st</sup> of June 1911. Prabhas Patan, Miscellaneous Correspondence, 1932-1938, HPORD, list 2., file 18, daftar 390. BRO (VG).

<sup>79</sup> Yagnik and Sheth, *The Shaping of Modern Gujarat*, p. 205.

<sup>80</sup> Ibrahim Rangwala, *Anjuman-e-Islam (1884-1984) Centenary Celebration Volume*, cited in *ibid.*, p. 205.

were much more aggressive and aimed at confrontation and frequently hurt the religious feelings of the other community. The religious arena consolidated itself as the battlefield where communities cope with their differences.

This riot will be analyzed in detail in the following chapter since the participation of the Hindu Mahasabha took the lead in this episode. However a few words on it to contextualize the event are necessary. In September 1927 the Ganapati procession was led by Vamanrao Mukadam, a Hindu Mahasabha leader well known for being a staunch anti-Muslim. While leading the procession he started provoking Muslims by asking the processionists to stop in front of a mosque and the musicians to keep playing their musical instruments. This led communal clashes and months later in 1928, he himself was hurt in an ambush because his belligerent anti-Muslim activism had accumulated much resentment against the Mahasabhaite. This communal climate was broadly encouraged by the different organizations and several social sectors were aware of this and for the case of Muslim organizations they campaigned against Hindus as well to counter Hindu militancy with Muslim militancy.

On the Muslim side, for instance, some leaders openly blamed the Arya Samaj for the breaking out of riots. For them the tour of this organization throughout the Gujarati region had ignited the communal hostilities through the encouragement of confrontational activities and rhetoric. A Muslim Maulvi was convinced of this and it was reflected in his speeches delivered before a large audience of about 1000 people.

On 1-10-28, Maulvi Abdulla Latha of Attarsumba broke journey at Baroda and gave a sermon (Wayaj)... In the course of the sermon the preacher dwelt on the riots at Godhra, Surat, etc. and remarked that they were due to the anti-Mahomedan activities of the Arya Samajists. He said that

he personally visited Surat immediately after the riots. He said that the authorities of these places did not take steps to stop music before mosques, although it was being played against the order.<sup>81</sup>

This perception was not unfounded in regard to the Arya Samaj's involvement, since they did actually developed activities to create and perpetuate animadversion against Muslims. Their broad activism did have impact on society and in mobilizing its members. In this sense, the colonial authorities when investigating the breaking out of some riots, investigated in the process the link of Arya Samaj and Hindu Mahasabha members in the development of aggression. For instance, B.S Moonje from the Hindu Mahasabha was investigated by the police about his responsibility in the outbreak of violence in Surat in 1928 and was banned from delivering any kind of public speech in this period as will be explored in detail in the following chapter.

The Samaj's activism did not circumscribe to deliver speeches and sermons. The circulations of bhajans, songs, books or even presenting theatrical plays were means the organization utilized in propagating its ideology and created trouble. An episode in Gandevi taluka in the 25<sup>th</sup> of May 1929 illustrates this,

The Aryasamajists, who had gone to Bilimora, for collecting subscriptions for the Itola Guru Kul, had organized a meeting there... Then after, a dialogue was performed by the girls of the Guru Kul, in which the Aryasamajists had depicted a scene which showed how a Hindu girl was rescued by the girls of the Guru Kul from the hands of a Mussalman who was carrying her away. An objection was raised by a Mussalman spectator not to stage the scene publicly, and words were exchanged between the Hindus and Mussalmans and a quarrel ensued. Both the parties got slight injuries in the affray. 14 Mussalmans and 6 Hindus have been arrested and a case of riot would shortly be committed against the mischief-mongers. While dispersing the mob the

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<sup>81</sup> Confidential no. 5 of 1928-1929. Confidential Report for the period ending the 14<sup>th</sup> October 1928, Baroda district. Fortnightly reports received from the police commissioner and supplied to the residency. Pt II. From January 1928 to 16 December 1929. BROC 21, Political Hall, file 9. p. 335-337. BRO (VG).

Bilimora naib Fouzdar was slightly hurt by a stone throw. Case under section 226 (K) Local-Penal-Code was being made against the Aryasamajists.<sup>82</sup>

Arya Samajist activism consisted not only in spreading a pejorative image of Islam. More than that, they called to undertake concrete actions against Muslim community and its several sectors. For instance, in a meeting in Khadia Pole on the 9<sup>th</sup> October 1928, some Arya Samajists, Swami Paramanand, Thakore Govindsinhji of Agra and Pandit Anandpriya of Baroda preached the audience on 'Hindu Sanghatan' or unity, a pillar in the Hindu Mahasabha agenda. They called Hindus to get together against Muslims irrespective of castes. In particular Swami Paramanand 'also advocated the social boycott of Mahomedans and requested the people to make an early start in that direction by refusing to supply daily wants of the Mahomedans. He added they should avoid receiving their daily supply of milk from Musalman milkmen; similarly they should see that their women folk did not get their bangles from the shops of Musalmans.'<sup>83</sup>

Thus at these contentious junctures, the leaders of the communities and members of these organizations demanded the stop of daily interaction of communities that was, in fact, taking place although with an increasing suspicion from each party.

On the other hand, Muslim bodies also contributed to social agitation. Their tour in different places of Gujarat was not undertaken in pacifist terms. On the 2 January 1932 Sayajirao allowed the playing of music before mosques without providing any further explanation. This measure produced great discontent among Muslim sectors in Baroda. The community's resistance included petitions, meetings, publication of articles opposing the measure but also the

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<sup>82</sup> Confidential report for the period ending 13-6-29. Fortnightly reports received from the police commissioner and supplied to the residency. Pt II. From January 1928 to 16 December 1929. Political Hall. BROC 21, file no. 9, p. 591. BRO (VG).

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 335.

activism of Muslim organizations increased in order to mobilize people against this action with very concrete and also controversial measures that were calculated to hurt the religious feelings of Hindus. To some extent Sayajirao was not seen as responsible for the measure, since certain Muslim sectors believed that ‘some partial Hindu officers mislead His Highness in the esteem of his Mahomedan subjects.’<sup>84</sup>

In this occasion the Arya Samaj was blamed as well since, in Muslim perception, thanks to them ‘the poisonous air of communal friction has come to spread’.<sup>85</sup> In addition, Muslim leaders clearly explained what to do before the implementation of music before mosques

Of course the freedom of allowing music before mosques could create a fire in the hearts of the Mussalmans. But its retaliation whenever music will be played in front of Masjid the Mussalmans should slaughter a cow and distribute her meat amongst poor Mahommedans.

Per chance if the place (where this shall be done) would be such that according to the law of the land, a slaughter cannot be held, then under the circumstances the Mussalmans of the City or the town should purchase a best, fresh, big, young, cow with a good tail, having 32 crores of deities within her, by raising the necessary amount by contributing and should send her to the Mussalmans of the nearest village or City at which there would be no prohibition under law, for the cow slaughter.

Thereafter all details about the atrocities, committed by Hindus and about the necessity of holding cow slaughters in retaliation of such Hindu atrocities being permitted should be published in some Muslim Newspaper with mention of the place, date and other details.

If at all cow is the real mother of the Hindus then they will come to her rescue by throwing down musical instruments.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Translation of an extract from “Din” a Gujarati newspaper dated the 1<sup>st</sup> of February 1932, published at Ahmedabad., Music before mosques 1932. HPOPD, list 4, general daftar 843, file 68, p. 66. BRO (VG).

<sup>85</sup> English translation of an article which appeared in the vernacular paper “Muslim” published at Ranpur the 30<sup>th</sup> January 1932, under the heading “Slaughter of only one Cow is quite enough to stop the playing of music before mosques”. Music before mosques 1932. HPOPD, list 4, general daftar 843, file 68, p. 76. BRO (VG).

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 80-8.



In this sense, one of the most contentious issues between Hinduism and Islam was the playing of music before mosques and cow killing in retaliation. Thus by creating Cow Protection Sabhas, started by the Arya Samaj in 1882, the idea was unifying a diverse Hindu community around one issue but also a process of demonizing Muslims as cruel butchers was started.<sup>87</sup> Therefore a very important part of the Hindu mission was protecting the venerated cow, containing '52 crores of Hindu deities'. However, it is worth emphasizing that cow protection at this time was not necessarily an issue between the major communities in India; as we have seen British were criticized as well for their meat consumption and on the other side of the spectrum, some Muslim individuals were even members of the Gau Rakshaka (cowprotecting) Sabhas<sup>88</sup>. In addition, there were some clashes within Hindu sectors themselves, between vegetarians and meat-eaters Hindus. Therefore, the cow protection issue has several nuances and it was not a question of Hindus *versus* Muslims alone.

On the other hand, even if these societies propitiated conflicts between both communities and produced a combative mobilization around the cow killing issue, it is not possible to compare it with the militancy degrees achieved in the following decades.<sup>89</sup> As we have seen for the riot of 1893, although there was a strained situation between Hindus and Muslims in Prabhas Patan because of their holy places and things went worse with the killing of a cow on the part of Muslims, at the end, both communities could come to terms by the mediation of their leaders.

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<sup>87</sup> See Shabnum Tejani, *Indian Secularism*, p. 53.

<sup>88</sup> Circular Strictly Confidential dated the 20<sup>th</sup> September 1893, Bombay. Cow Killing agitation and Societies and Sabhas etc 1894. Miscellaneous files IOL: WISARCI. OIOC R/2/722/64. BL (L)

<sup>89</sup> As Shabnum Tejani shows, for instance, the mobilization in Bombay caused by the riots of 1893 did not altered dramatically the daily coexistence of Hindus and Muslims in the place. After the violence, people returned living as neighbours and interacting with each other. See *Indian Secularism*.

Thus cow protection activism was only an aspect in the process of configuring a pejorative conception of Muslim community as a main problem and target for Hindu activists. But following decades this issue would become more problematic and contentious.

In conclusion, the Arya Samaj was a fundamental institution in the self-understanding not only of Hindu but also Muslim community. Its activism helped to transform the views on the community whether it was Muslim, Hindu or Christian and their relationship with each other. It also contributed to create an atmosphere of confrontation that gradually became more militant at the light of the historical events. In this its working together with the Hindu Mahasabha was fundamental. The next chapter will analyze in deeper detail the Hindu Mahasabha-Arya Samaj binary.

## Chapter three

### The political and religious ideology of the Hindu Mahasabha and its influence in Gujarat

The current chapter will explore the nationalist philosophy and the activities of the Hindu Mahasabha in Gujarat. The role of this organization in the trajectory of Hindu nationalism is undeniable in the increasing development of a communal consciousness as a way of self-representation and self-understanding of the different cultural identities but also as a regular element in the historical narratives of India and Gujarat that perpetuated the representation of Hindus and Muslims in perennial confrontation both in the past and present.

The Hindu Mahasabha carried out campaigns in different Indian cities by several of its members to spread its message. This way, the promoters of Hindu *sangathan* or unity visited Gujarat to carry out the promotion of their vision. In this chapter we will calibrate the impact of the organization in the consolidation of a communal perspective in Gujarat in the crucial period from the 1920's to the 1940's and its close link with the Arya Samaj which crystallized in a common agenda.

The importance of studying an organization like the Hindu Mahasabha lies with its fundamental role in spreading a communal consciousness among the members of the civil society and in its capability for broadening the gap between the Hindu and Muslim community. In addition, there has not been a proper study of the organization's influence in Gujarat which was an essential centre for the activities of the organization. The Mahasabha was successful in mobilizing social sectors through local operators such as Vamanrao Mukadam who campaigned in Gujarat in the 1920s and showed the potential of the organization in producing social instability.

## The ideological formulations of the Hindu Mahasabha

The Hindu Mahasabha was founded within the sphere of the Congress in Hardwar in 1915 and its direct precedent were the Hindu Sabhas that emerged in Allahabad, Benares and Kanpur before this date. However, the earliest sabha was the Provincial Hindu Sabha, formed to save the interests of the Hindu minority in the Punjab where Muslim community was the majority. The creation of the Mahasabha attempted to achieve an all-India dimension,<sup>1</sup> not only in a political sphere but also in a religious domain as one of its most influential presidents will put it years later: ‘The Mahasabha is not in the main a Hindu-Dharma-Sabha [Organization of Hindu religion] but it is pre-eminently a Hindu-Rashtra-Sabha [Organisation of Hindu nation] and is a Pan-Hindu organization shaping the destiny of the Hindu Nation in all its social, political and cultural aspects.’<sup>2</sup> Thus the organization was a political body, first, that attempted to regulate the different dimensions of Hindu culture including the religious one.

The presence of the Hindu Mahasabha within the Congress during the first phase of its existence, from 1915 to 1922 was rather diluted even if it was created as a pressure group within the Congress and its main objective was to influence the party leadership to contest Muslim demands for reinforcing their influence in politics by an increase in administration quotas and the elective assemblies.<sup>3</sup>

The different interests within the Congress made clear that it was a very eclectic organization and this was also reflected in the existence of different sections that supported a number of diverse organizations like the Hindu Mahasabha itself. In

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Gordon, ‘The Hindu Mahasabha and the Indian National Congress 1915-1926, *Modern South Asia Studies*, 9 (1975). p. 149.

<sup>2</sup> V.D. Savarkar, ‘Presidential Address at the 19<sup>th</sup> Session of the All India Hindu Mahasabha’ in Savarkar, *Hindu Sanghathan: its ideology and immediate programme* (Bombay: 1940). p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics*, p. 19.

this sense, the Congress wing led by Motilal Nehru was in declared opposition to Madan Mohan Malaviya segment that followed a more conservative line. Nehru was a western oriented politician, and in contrast, Malaviya an orthodox Hindu Brahman<sup>4</sup> who was to restart the Mahasabha in 1923 from the Congress platform. The unproblematic actuation of the Hindu Mahasabha was allowed from some sectors of the Congress in Gujarat, for instance, even the most fervent Gandhi's followers such as Vallabhbhai Patel, leader of the Gujarat Provincial Congress Committee for many years (1921-1946)<sup>5</sup>, never disqualified the Mahasabha regardless of its aggressive stance and its being openly opposed to the Gandhian notion of ahimsa. We shall explore this in chapter five.

From its inception, the Hindu Mahasabha advocated the adoption of Hindi and Nagri as well as the sensitive issue of cow protection, and in general terms, the uplift of the Hindus.<sup>6</sup> From this agenda, cow protection became one of the main links of the Mahasabha to the Arya Samaj, an organisation that, as seen in the previous chapter, started sabhas for preventing cow killing in the 1880's. The cow protection issue, as explored before, was basically though not exclusively anti-Muslim and was to unite many Hindus around this issue. Apart from its anti-Muslim character, the cow protection movement portrayed the period where cow protection existed as 'dharmraj' contrasting it with the contemporary period easily seen as 'the age of evil'. The implication of British as beef eaters was logical.<sup>7</sup> Thus the cow protection movement targeted colonial administrators as well.

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<sup>4</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, *India's silent revolution: The Rise of the Lower Castes in North India*, (London: 2003).

<sup>5</sup> David Hardiman, 'Congress Organization in Gujarat in the 1920s and 1930s' in D. N. Panigrahi (ed), *Economy, Society and Politics in Modern India*, (New Delhi:1985), p. 277.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Gordon, 'The Hindu Mahasabha and the Indian National Congress', p. 151.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Robb, 'The Challenge of Gau Mata: British Policy and Religious Change in India, 1880-1916', *Modern Asian Studies*, 20 (1986), p. 295. [consulted at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/312577>].

Cow protection then, was one of the most controversial matters between Hindus and Muslims. Whenever Hindus played music before mosques, Muslims retaliated sometimes by slaughtering a cow, and this measure was, in fact, used as a defying strategy by Muslim leaders to mobilise the community against Hindus. Several episodes in Gujarat involving cow slaughter show how effective was this to arouse animosities: in the 1893 riot the situation between Hindus and Muslims in Prabhas Patan was exacerbated when Muslims killed a cow in a context of disputes over a place of worship claimed by both communities.<sup>8</sup> In Baroda in 1932 after the decision by Sayajirao that music before mosques would be allowed, some Muslim individuals called on their religious peers to kill a cow if music was performed outside any a mosque.<sup>9</sup> In 1933 in Mangrol both music before mosques and cow killing were allowed to be performed by the Darbar, both measures aroused huge controversy and caused strife between the Hindus and Muslims of the state.<sup>10</sup>

In addition, from 1937-1941 there was a constant tension in some places in Gujarat: Baroda, Surat, Viramgam and Ahmedabad, and again one of the problems between communities was cow slaughter in retaliation to music before mosques. In this context, in 1939 Hindu Mahasabha leaders participated in the disputes and encouraged Hindu people to confront Muslims over this issue. Thus the Mahasabha as a political institution was deeply involved and benefited from religious facts and controversies being cow protection one of its effective strategies for mobilization.

But during 1915-1922 the Hindu Mahasabha had a low profile in its political actuation. The non-cooperationist Congress section led by Gandhi occupied the

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<sup>8</sup> Telegram reply from Haridas Vihasidas, Diwan of Junagadh to Major F. U. Snell, Assistant Poll. Agent dated the 7<sup>th</sup> April 1892. Patan Riot. Hindus and Mussulmans Patan Commission. Pt. I, 1893. Miscellaneous files IOL: WISARCI. OIOC R/2/721/56. p. 7. BL (L).

<sup>9</sup> See chapter two of this research pp. 103-105.

<sup>10</sup> Mangrol – cow-slaughter and music before mosques. Miscellaneous files IOL: WISARCI. OIOC R/2/637/304. p. 5. BL (L).

central place in the politics of these crucial years. The Gandhian impetus of the non-cooperation movement unified, if artificially, different groups of the Congress and Muslim sectors even though they disagreed or agreed partially with the principles that were being supported. A controversial point in the non-cooperation movement agenda was joining hands with the Khilafat Committee. However, from the start, the members of the Hindu Mahasabha looked suspiciously at the Khilafat movement as a part of their struggle. In this context, the Khilafat committee demanded that the Caliph should maintain the control of Islamic sacred places; that he must preserve his territories just as in a pre-war period to safeguard his position of Muslim leader and that the region identified as *Jazirat-ul-Arab* —including Arabia, Syria, Iraq and Palestine— should not be under non-Islamic sovereignty.<sup>11</sup> The other causes for the non-cooperation-Khilafat movement were the promotion of *swaraj*; nationalization of education; resignation of titles and the boycott of foreign clothes.

Malaviya, as the head of the Hindu Mahasabha, opposed particularly the boycott of education; among other things, the Mahasabhaites considered Hindu-Muslim unity as superficial and believed that this boycott would affect the Hindu interests in the long term. There was no identification when they were asked to boycott the legislative council elections in the name of Islam, as a result only a few members of the Hindu Mahasabha remained at the margin of the 1920 legislatures, and they carried on working on the legislatures that were supposed to be boycotted.<sup>12</sup> However Muslim participation in politics had not been defined by a religious feature. On the contrary, ‘Muslim Nationalism was a movement of Muslims and not a movement of Islam. It was an ethnic movement of disaffected Muslim professionals

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<sup>11</sup> Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *From Plassey to Partition: A History of Modern India* (Hyderabad: 2004), p. 300

<sup>12</sup> Richard Gordon, ‘The Hindu Mahasabha and the Indian National Congress’, p. 164.

and the government-job-seeking educated Indian Muslim middle class...<sup>13</sup>. But the Khilafat movement set the precedent for a militant religiosity that was going to be displayed in the political arena as the idiom of Indian Muslims.<sup>14</sup>

Thus the development of the Mahasabha in Gujarat was possible in a climate of communal religious antagonism in the aftermath of the Mapilla rebellion and the collapse of the Khilafat movement in 1921. In Siddhpur, for instance, located in Patan district, north Gujarat, a series of clashes between Hindus and Muslims occurred in 1923-1924, not as directly propitiated by the happenings in Malabar but as part of an increasingly convulsive atmosphere in which the breach between Hindus and Muslims became wider while communities were increasingly defined in more homogeneous terms. The existence of these conditions stood for a fertile ground for the thriving of the combative ideology posed by the Mahasabha. It is relevant to highlight that these years were foundational in the new dimension the riots acquired as it was recorded in a report of the Bombay presidency that explained the causes of riots.

Bombay Presidency had generally been free from communal disturbances of any widespread nature, and, even after disturbances of a widespread nature arising out of the differences between Hindus and Muhammadans had broken out in other parts of India, this presidency had set an example of moderation. That was practically the position up to 1924.<sup>15</sup>

A new stage in the trajectory of communal hostilities was inaugurated. In Surat this was also the case where major conflicts happened after the Malabar rebellion, in the second decade of the twentieth century (1927-1929) when the communities' diversity

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<sup>13</sup> Hamza Alavi, 'Ironies of History: Contradictions of the Khilafat Movement', in *Islam, Communities and the nation: Muslim Identities in South Asia and Beyond*, Mushirul Hasan, (ed), (New Delhi: 1998), p. 35.

<sup>14</sup> For a detailed exploration of this see *ibid*.

<sup>15</sup> Printed proof copy of the note on Hindu Moslem tension received from the Reforms Secretary. Indian Statutory Commission. Hindu-Moslem relation. 1) Note on Hindu Moslem relation prepared for the Statutory Commission. 2) Note on Hindu Moslem relation and movement of a subversive character since September 1928. HDSB, file 143 K (b). MSA (B).



was being diluted replaced by the notions of monolithic communities contending in the political arena.<sup>16</sup>

The ideological aspect of the organization was a main factor in spreading violence; its exploration is helpful in throwing light in the aversion for the Muslim community by several Hindu sectors. And the Mahasabha's ideological constructs socialized by this militant branch of Hindu nationalism proved its effectiveness in mobilizing social sectors of Hindu community.

The Mahasabha was described in the organization's literature as 'the central organization of 28 crores of Hindus in Hindustan and of all the Hindus throughout the world [whose] main object is the protection, propagation and consolidation of the Hindu Dharma, Hindu culture, Hindu Rashtra and the Hindu race'.<sup>17</sup> When analyzing the foundational postulates of the Mahasabha it is possible to figure out what the main concerns of the organization were:

- (1) to organise Hindu sabhas throughout the length and breadth of the country;
- (2) to provide relief to such Hindus, men and women, as need help on account of communal riots and disturbances;
- (3) reconversion of Hindus who have been forcibly converted to Islam;
- (4) to organise gymnasiums for the use of Hindu young men and women;
- (7) to request the trustees and keepers of the various Hindu temples to open halls attached to the temples where people may gather to discuss matters of social and religious interests;
- (8) to celebrate Hindu festivals in a manner which may conduce to the promotion of brotherly feelings among the different sections of the Hindus;
- (9) to promote good feelings with Muhammadans and Christians;
- (10) to represent the communal interests of the Hindus in all political controversies...

Among the priority aspects for the Mahasabha reorganization are the reconversion of Muslim neo-converts –particularly the ones from the Malabar coast rebellion— and the opening of *akhadas* or gymnasiums which contradicts the promotion of “good

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<sup>16</sup> Douglas Haynes, *Rhetoric and Ritual in Colonial India*, p. 261.

<sup>17</sup> 'Report showing the constitution, organization, and objects of the Hindu Maha Sabha', 20<sup>th</sup> April, 1934, All-India Hindu Mahasabha, Provincial Organisation, 1934, HDSB, file 355(73), D, Pt. II. p. 67. MSA (B).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

feelings with Muhammadans and Christians” stated in the Sabhas’s agenda. This controversial activity, the establishment of *akhadas*, was strongly encouraged by the members of this organization particularly, B.S. Moonje, one of the most active presidents in this issue who campaigned in 1935 in Gujarat for the creation of *akhadas* and particularly a military school in the state. In this year Moonje toured Baroda together with the Arya Samaj and participated in a Samajist processions in the city ‘to save Hinduism from deterioration’.<sup>19</sup>

But in his presidential address in 1922, Madan Mohan Malaviya referred to the attempt to come to terms with Muslim people whenever a dispute between communities occurred: ‘when Hindus are oppressed we should approach Muslim leaders to devise means to settle disputes. In case riots occur we should settle matters in consultation with leaders of both communities.’<sup>20</sup> However, encouraging the physical training of the Hindu members to defend themselves from possible aggressions was not helpful in the endeavour of settling issues in a peaceful manner. By contrast, it was a measure that could propel wider confrontation among communities by encouraging a physical way to sort out differences and it actually did it as we will be seen lines below.

This measure conformed to the Mahasabha’s perception of Hindus as a vulnerable community which having been a ‘respectful’ civilization were not prepared to defend themselves from aggression because ‘Hinduism believes in the policy of ‘live and let live’, while the Muslims look on non-Islamies as Kaffers [infidels] who may be treacherously murdered if need be...’<sup>21</sup> That is why the opening of *akhadas*

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<sup>19</sup> Confidential fortnightly report for the period ending 24<sup>th</sup> May 1935. Fortnightly confidential reports from 11<sup>th</sup> August 1934 to 31<sup>st</sup> July 1936. Huzur Political Office, CD, file 26, BROC 26. BRO (VG).

<sup>20</sup> Presidential address by Madan Mohan Malaviya at the Hindu Mahasabha Annual Meeting, 1923, quoted in Jaffrelot, (ed), *Hindu Nationalism. A Reader*, p. 67.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Hindu Sabha Camp’, Shibir, 29 May 1943, All-India Hindu Mahasabha and Provincial organizations, HDSB, file no. 355 (73) D, Pt. I, p. 295. MSA (B).

became a fundamental concern for the Hindu Sanghatan movement. The referred helplessness of the Hindus was mainly translated for them into aggressions on Hindu women by members of the ‘antagonist’ community who took advantage of the Hindu male ‘weakness’ for defending their women. The establishment of akhadas had as their purpose to recover a supposed lost tradition of Hindus who according to Moonje ‘belonged to a warrior class in ancient times, but the teachings of Gautam Buddha and his doctrine of non-violence had unnerved them and consequently they were conquered by the Mahommadans.’<sup>22</sup> This representation of Hindu docility was effectively circulated by newspapers and other publications of the period that related plenty of cases about the supposed Muslim predation on Hindu women and Hindu communal organizations also subscribed and circulated this idea. The Arya Samaj together with the Mahasabha circulated these kinds of representations, and by means of theatrical plays they constructed the image of Muslims as kidnappers of Hindu girls as was seen in the previous chapter.<sup>23</sup> Under this perspective, which was beginning to be widely spread, ‘military training [part of the physical training] was essential to Indians if they wanted to live as men’.<sup>24</sup>

The representation of Hindus as deeply vulnerable was related not only to physical strength, but also to the question of numbers. In this consideration the whole of the Hindu community was becoming weaker because of a theoretical exodus of groups of people from it. In 1923, this issue was brought to the surface in the annual

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<sup>22</sup> Confidential report for the period ending 10<sup>th</sup> April 1936. Fortnightly confidential reports from 11<sup>th</sup> August 1934 to 31<sup>st</sup> July 1936. Huzur Political Office, CD, file 26, BROC 26. BRO (VG).

<sup>23</sup> This correlation of Muslim ‘virility’ and Hindu ‘effeminacy’ was not new to this period and it has interesting origins in the colonial classifications of the Indian population. Gazetteers, censuses and other official publications depicted population in these terms but also historical works of colonial authors contributed to a characterization of this kind. See for instance James Mill and his *History of British India*, (reprint. 1975, of orig. edn, Chicago, 1818).

<sup>24</sup> B.S. Moonje, ‘Necessity of a Military Training’, lecture in 5<sup>th</sup> July, 1935. Military School, B.S. Moonje, HDSB, file no. 812-A. MSA (B).

conference of the Hindu Mahasabha where the organization expressed its concern for reincorporating the untouchables and low caste groups within the Hindu fold.

In this sense, the task of reconversion became more comprehensive, it was not going to be addressed only to the converts of the Mapilla rebellion converted by force, now other groups that had been habitually neglected by the caste system would be reincorporated. The scheme of recovery of converted low caste groups was not a task undertaken in isolation. The Hindu Mahasabha jointly with the Arya Samaj implemented the recovery task through shuddhi which was wholly supported by the Mahasabha from 1923 when Malaviya relaunched the organisation.

The idea of the migration of low caste people away from Hinduism was not confined to this period and in previous years other political figures, like the progressive Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad, ruler of Baroda, had already considered that 'the Hindu Society is deteriorating numerically, the reason being that low class people are turning Mahomedans and Christians by the hundred.'<sup>25</sup> Although he mentioned Islam as one of the religions of the converts his main concern was Christianity in a period when most of the people changing their Hindu religion became Christians. But differently to the attitude of the 20's, at the beginning of the twentieth century the stance, if not general, was that 'I do not blame the Christians. If we are not going to admit low-caste people to their legitimate rights, I do not see any reason why should we blame Mahomedans and Christians for doing what we profess our inability to do.'<sup>26</sup> During the 20's, reconversion presupposed a visibly more aggressive attitude in the attempt to retrieve the neo-converts of Islam and Christianity since there was a feeling that both Muslims and Christians had

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<sup>25</sup> Reply to the address of Arya Samaj, Lahore 26 September, 1903, Speeches delivered by Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad of Baroda, CD. BRO (VG).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

exacerbated their proselytizing activities undertaken to the detriment of Hindu community. Several publications conveyed this feeling:

But I do not see how one can logically and justly object to the Hindus doing what the others have been doing for centuries—particularly as the Hindus have not gone in for the accession to their ranks of “rice” Hindus, of non-Hindu women abducted or confiscated and obliged to be converted, of men tempted to come over by the prospect of marriage, of persons induced to be converted by the prospect of economic advantage, and of persons forced to be converted by terrorism of any kind. The Hindu Mahasabha and Hindu missions connected with it, formally or informally, want re-conversion and conversion only by fair, open and legitimate means.<sup>27</sup>

This way, the aspect of reconversion will become particularly important in the Hindu Mahasabha agenda as well as it was for the Arya Samaj and in this historical context in general, and its centrality is closely related to the organization’s understanding of Islam in India.

The Mahasabha’s considerations of Islam in the subcontinent are a key aspect to comprehend the organization’s negative stance towards Muslim sectors.

Savarkar, the controversial founder of Hindutva ideology, while touring in Gujarat expressed about the Pakistan scheme in Narayan Guru’s Talim in Baroda that

The Muslim League demanded Pakistan but several institutions opposed it and stated that India must remain undivided. The Muslim stated that they would take Pakistan on the strength of their power. Congress made no opposition. Dr. Savarkar then asked Hindus to become ready to oppose the Muslims. He said the Muslims were not the original inhabitants of India. Britishers came to India 300 year ago only and Muslims were also outsiders like the British. Cooperation was not possible with outsiders. The speaker further said that he helped the Congress when it was weak. The salvation of India would be the salvation of Hindu Rashtra. If Pakistan was granted a great calamity would fall on India. If Hindu youths did not oppose this the Hindu Religion would be ruined.<sup>28</sup>

The previous statement shared a common view that circulated in contemporary circles, that is, the representation of Muslims as outsiders to the Indian soil that oppressed Hindus. When talking about India’s salvation, Savarkar’s idea of nation is

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<sup>27</sup> Cutting “No Bullying by Mussalmans”, *The Times of India*, 1<sup>st</sup> April 1929. All-India Hindu Mahasabha and Provincial organizations. HDSB, file no. 355 (73) D. MSA (B).

<sup>28</sup> Confidential fortnightly report for the period ending 26<sup>th</sup> April 1946. Fortnightly confidential reports from 12<sup>th</sup> August 1945-48, CD, daftar 6, file 140, p. 293. BRO (VG).

perfectly clear, only the Hindu Rashtra, that is, a Hindu nation was possible within the subcontinent. British are foreigners as much as Muslims and no cooperation was possible with them. Thus a Hindu ethnic-nationalism is evident and excludes people alien to India. Moreover, the problem with Muslims is their non-Hindu affiliation. In his perspective, Islam was a threat for Hindu religion and stood for its ruin. That is why he visualized a Hindu nation on the basis of Hindutva or the pre-eminence of Hindu culture in all the spheres of life.

Elaborating further on this, on 19<sup>th</sup> April Savarkar delivered another speech in the famous Manekrao's akhada which was frequently visited by extremists to address people. Savarkar said under the auspices of the Baroda Hindu Sabha and Shivaji Sangh that

Formerly he worked in the Congress but later on he left it when the Congress followed the policy of non-violence. He stated that violent acts which were practised during the revolutionary period and which brought about a change – was not a [*sic*] violence. Those people who gave sacrifices and took part in such revolutions were not considered violent. He stated that the Hindus did not demand more power but the Muslims demanded that which the Hindus possessed.<sup>29</sup>

One important aspect to highlight is that Savarkar's former closeness to the Congress confirms that this party working as an umbrella institution gathered many different political trends; its door seemed to be open for different politicians not always supporting the Congress ideals of ahimsa and inter-community unity. On the contrary, extreme minds such as Malaviya, Munshi, Savarkar or Mukadam were coming from its ranks and at some point remained attached to it; Malaviya himself restarted the Mahasabha from within the Congress. And as expressed before, there was no clear split between the Congress and the Mahasabha in Gujarat when the interests of both institutions became evidently divergent.

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<sup>29</sup> Confidential fortnightly report for the period ending 26<sup>th</sup> April 1946. Fortnightly confidential reports from 12<sup>th</sup> August 1945-48, CD, daftar 6, file 140, p. 294. BRO (VG).

On the other hand, it must be underlined that the Savarkarean notion of violence is rather equivalent to that of sacrifice. Thus, he demanded from people to ‘sacrifice’ in order to oppose Muslims who wanted to deprive Hindus from their right to prevail in the Hindu Rashtra. The logical assumption from this is that Hindus would be simply defending themselves from Muslim aggressions.

But the need for sacrifice/violence supported by Mahasabha members was entrenched in a common representation of this age that emphasized the supposed cowardliness of Hindus in comparison to Muslims, a feature elaborated constantly in speeches to mobilize people into action:

Dr. Moonje contrasted the cowardice of 25 crores of Hindus with the bravery of 4 ½ crores of Germans who had defied the world for over four years; he taunted them with being ruled by a handful of foreigners, and with being so afraid of the Mahomedans that their temples were desecrated and their women violated whenever a riot occurred. There had been a time when they had fought the Portuguese in the south, the English in the east and the Mahomedans in the north simultaneously. Moslems were more interested in Turkey, Palestine etc. than India.<sup>30</sup>

This discourse elaborates a very poor idea of history. In his triumphalist version of the Indian past he ignored the fact that many of the battles that he held were for ‘Hindus’ were in fact led by Muslim rulers. In addition, Moonje also articulated the idea of cowardice of present day Hindus as contrasted to historical Hindus and set the example of German people for ‘defying’ the world. As we have seen, Hindu weakness was a common idea circulating in several spheres, but the problem was on how this situation should be overcome. In the case of many Hindu right figures, it should be by opposing Muslims.

There is also the unambiguous depiction of Muslims as temple desecrators and as potential rapists of Hindu women. The most interesting but alarming aspect of this narrative is that the ‘atrocities’ committed by Muslims are not past events. On the

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<sup>30</sup> Extract from the Weekly Letter, dated the 11<sup>th</sup> January 1934, from the District Magistrate, Sholapur, All India Hindu Mahasabha, Provincial Organisation, 1934, HDSB, file 355(73) D Pt. II, p. 5. MSA (B).

contrary, there is a persistent 'presentism' in which the contemporary history becomes a reflection of that oppressive past history produced by an aggressive Islam. Hence the narratives between the 20's and 40's decades had parallel images of Islamic fanaticism and intolerance<sup>31</sup>:

The relations between Hindus and Mahomedans have not been as happy and cordial as they ought to be... In 1916 in Eastern Bengal inhuman, brutal, unparalleled atrocities were perpetrated on Hindus. Hindu women were outraged by fanatic Mahomedans and many Hindu women had to take shelter in rivers and tanks to protect their honour... In 1914...Hindu houses were regularly looted and Hindu women dishonoured... Again in 1920 brutal and inhuman atrocities were perpetrated on Hindus by Moplahs in Malabar. Hindu houses were looted, women were outraged, male and female butchered... for refusing to embrace Islam.<sup>32</sup>

This representation emphasizes that it is 'fanatic Mahomedans' that perpetrate these aggressions, but the narrative, in general, conveys the feeling of a Muslim community that is hostile as a whole. The repetitiveness of these atrocities in the narration creates a generalization which does not give the possibility of evaluating Muslim community in a differentiated way by identifying only a sector of it as the aggressors. Thus at the end, history is recurrent and shows a trajectory of Muslim hostilities on Hindu community both in the past and present.

The Sabha's rhetoric is meticulous in emphasizing that Islam is compulsive with conversion and to achieve this end utilizes all sorts of resources including persecution and terrorization of the population. In this, 'historical' facts confirm Islamic methods of coercion and pressure. There it is 'Jahangir [that] killed 10 lakhs of people every year... [and the obsession of Muslims for Hindu women since] to marry a rival's wife is deemed a heroic act in Islam ... [instead] the Hindus respect others' wives like their mothers... [in contrast] 2,700 Hindu females have been

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<sup>31</sup> The repetitiveness of this kind of narrative can ominously be perceived in the contemporary period in Gujarat, where a rhetoric that vilifies Muslim community was successfully re-elaborated in the attacks on Muslims in 2002. See Dipankar Gupta, *Justice Before Reconciliation*.

<sup>32</sup> Presidential address by M.M. Malaviya, 1923 cited in Christophe Jaffrelot (ed), *Hindu nationalism: A Reader*, p. 65-66.



kidnapped in Bengal...<sup>33</sup>. The Hindus, needless to say, are the obvious antithesis of Muslims: respectful, tolerant, peaceful and non-fanatics.

The elaboration of Muslim fanaticism in Hindu opinionated spheres is fundamental in the process of creating a Muslim nemesis, but the adoption of this representation by Muslim sectors is also an essential factor in their construction as fanatics or bigots:

That Musalman might be having an ordinary weak and lean body and might be pale-looking... But when what is called..... *the spirit of martyrdom* possesses him he does not (wait to) see whether the person opposing him is a god or a mad man. Whether he is armed or possesses bottles and whether his (enemy's) blow would come upon his head or heart. He does not wait to see any such thing. He knows only this much, viz., to die or to kill.<sup>34</sup>

The 'spirit of martyrdom' according to the previous argument is in the nature of every Muslim, weak or strong, because in dying for Islam "they knew the cost of life and every time they prayed to God to give death in a fight with Kaffirs so that they could go to heaven."<sup>35</sup> However, even though there cannot be a generalization of Muslim community in their self-assumption of belligerent defenders of Islam, the inflammatory speeches of some of its members should undoubtedly have had an important impact on Hindu sectors in considering Muslims as fanatics and as dangerous individuals matching the depictions Hindu right representatives elaborated of them.

The role of minorities within the Hindu nation was another prominent issue in the Hindu Mahasabha's agenda. In the perspective of the organisation 'fortunately our countrymen, including the Parsis, Jews, Christians and even the Anglo-Indians have

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<sup>33</sup> 'Hindu Sabha Camp', Shibir, 29 May, 1943, All-India Hindu Mahasabha and Provincial organizations, HDSB, file no. 355 (73) D, Pt. I, p. 295. MSA (B).

<sup>34</sup> Editorial note "A direct reply to Mr. Munshi" appearing at page 2 of the issue of the *Khilafat* (Gujarati), dated the 31<sup>st</sup> August 1941, Akhand Hindustan Front, Newspaper cuttings, 1941-1942, HDSB, file no. 1046-B, p. 77-79. MSA (B).

<sup>35</sup> Copy of the report of the Sub-Inspector of Police, Ahmedabad, 17<sup>th</sup> April 1925, Information on pamphlets and speeches, HDSB, file 355 (25) D. p. 27. MSA (B).

ever extended their hand of friendship. The majority did support the integrity of India. Reasonable safeguards for the minorities, the Hindu Mahasabha is ever willing to guarantee.’<sup>36</sup> This discourse conveys the idea that most of the minority groups in India are unproblematic; Parsis, Jews and even Christian support the integrationist cause of the Hindus. Therefore, according to Hindu Mahasabha’s argumentation, minorities in India are welcome because there could be cooperation with most of them. Apparently, the organization was willing to safeguard minorities but not indiscriminately, since ‘the fact is that it is not a question of the minorities but of one minority, the Muslim minority. The only safeguard which can be satisfactory to this Muslim minority is, as has been most definitely declared by them, to lay an axe at the root of Indian integrity.’<sup>37</sup> According to Savarkar’s argument, the conflict with this community was because Muslims would only be satisfied –in the language of the time— with the vivisection of the country in order to have a country of their own, Pakistan. For Savarkar this was the main reason that made impossible to come to terms with them. The other minorities had proved their loyalty, the Muslims had not. But he missed the point that the increasing hostility of Hindu politicians and organizations against Muslims reinforced the idea of the necessity of Pakistan for many Muslims. But even if the Mahasabhaite posture on minorities is neither monolithic nor static, it is clear that Hindu supremacy should prevail in India

There is majority of Hindus in India. The majority in other countries such as Germany, England or France have an upper hand in administration. None looks to the demands of the minority party there. India must be ruled by Hindus... ‘Die for religion while dying kill all the others and conquer your own kingdom’.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> ‘Mahasabha and minority question. Savarkar on Viceroy’s speech’, *The Bombay Chronicle*, 24 December 1942, All-India Hindu Mahasabha and Provincial Organizations, HDSB, file no. 355 (73) D, Pt. I, p. 21. MSA (B).

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Speech by L.B. Bhopatkar, member of the Hindu Mahasabha, 2 September, 1939, Extract from the Weekly Letter, dated the 6<sup>th</sup> September 1939, from the District Magistrate, Satara, Hindu affairs, Speeches by Hindu Maha Sabha, 1939-1940. HDSB, file no. 1009, F 245, p. 25. MSA (B).

Thus minorities had a place within India but a limited one and their culture if not subsumed within the mainstream, must have a marginal status in comparison to the prime position of Hindu culture. Thus government and administration are key aspects in order to preserve the pre-eminence of the majority community; according to this logic none of the minorities should have a space in governmental sphere, that is, in the administration of the nation. This is because the place of minorities within the nation is related to the concept of nationalism in the understanding of the Hindu Mahasabha: 'what is called Nationalism can be defined as and is in fact the National Communalism of the majority community which has been ruling and still aspires to rule the country. Thus in Hindusthan it is the Hindus, professing Hindu religion and being in overwhelming majority, that constitute the National Community and create and formulate the Nationalism of the Nation.'<sup>39</sup>

The most unfortunate aspect is that the Mahasabhaite communal postulates did not remain within the circles of this kind of organizations as theoretical formulations to be discussed among its members in their meetings; they were ominously disseminated by the activism of deeply fervent members of the organization. The following section of this chapter will analyse this activism. The idea is examining the Mahasabha campaigns in Gujarat by exploring the interaction between the ideological and the mobilizational aspects. Focusing on some of its members, such as Vamanrao Mukadam from Godhra and other leading figures like V. S. Savarkar and B.S. Moonje we will be able to appreciate the social effect of their campaigning.

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<sup>39</sup> B. S. Moonje, 'Tenets of Hindu politics', in *Mahratta*, 8<sup>th</sup> January 1943. Poona. All-India Hindu Mahasabha and Provincial Organizations, HDSB, file no. 355 (73) D, Pt. I, p. 181. MSA (B).

## A belligerent activism in Gujarat and its social effect

In the meeting of August 1923 at Benares in the frame of the Sixth Annual Conference of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha, the institution was reorganized and several subcommittees were constituted to establish provincial branches and local Hindu sabhas. The Mahasabha divided India into 23 linguistic provinces; the division of Gujarat-Kathiawar was among them.<sup>40</sup> A local branch operated in Gujarat and one of its most zealous workers, Vamanrao Mukadam was more than active promoting Mahasabha ideology that, as seen in previous sections, was ardently anti-Muslim and concomitant with the organization's ideology, he also implemented actions absolutely threatening to communitarian stability both of Hindus and Muslims.

Vamanrao Mukadam, the lion of Panchmahal, was a Maharashtrian Brahman born in 1885 in Godhra in the Panchmahal district in Gujarat. He was a high school teacher in his hometown<sup>41</sup> and started his political career with demonstrations against forced labour and in the Home Rule movement and hereafter he remained active until the Quit India movement.<sup>42</sup> According to his contemporaries, he 'took inspiration from the life and works of Lokmanya Tilak for years and became an extremist',<sup>43</sup> although he was said to be an admirer of Gandhi.<sup>44</sup>

He was also an important leader of the Congress and since the early date of 1917 had organized the Gujarat Political Conference attended by Gandhi, Jinnah and Tilak.<sup>45</sup> This conference served to boost Gandhi's leadership in Gujarat.<sup>46</sup> And according to Mama Saheb Phadke –a social worker fighting against untouchability in

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<sup>40</sup> Richard Gordon, 'The Hindu Mahasabha and the Indian National Congress 1915-1926', p. 173.

<sup>41</sup> David Hardiman, 'Passing Blame on Godhra Muslims' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37 (2002), p. 1785 [consulted at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4412092>]

<sup>42</sup> Arun Vaghela, 'Vamanrao Mukadam: the Lion of Panch Mahal' in *Anvesna Itihasna Lekhono Sangraha* (Gandhinagar: 2001).

<sup>43</sup> Indulal Yagnik, *Autobiography*, cited in *ibid*.

<sup>44</sup> Mama Saheb Phadke, *Autobiography*, (Ahmedabad: 1974), p. 62.

<sup>45</sup> Yagnik and Sheth, *The Shaping of Modern Gujarat*, p. 214 .

<sup>46</sup> Arun Vaghela, 'Vamanrao Mukadam'.

Godhra and who established an ashram for untouchables in this city<sup>47</sup> — Vallabhbhai Patel was on good terms with Mukadam and they met frequently and talked about Hindu-Muslim issues.<sup>48</sup> Due to Mukadam's 'clarity of speech, he remained a life-long intimate of Sardar Patel'.<sup>49</sup> Perhaps because of this, the Sardar never seemed to show aversion toward the Mahasabha, since members both of the Congress and the Hindu right organization had, at several junctures, good relations. In this sense, it is worth highlighting the fact that the 1927-1928 riots in Godhra occurred almost in the same period that one of the most iconic satyagrahas in Gujarat, Bardoli, and Vallabhbhai Patel was the actual orchestrator of this event. In this sense, he could not have ignored Mukadam's production of violence taking place in the same Gujarati geography. But in spite of this it seems that there was no split between both political actors.

In addition to his militancy in the Mahasabha, Mukadam was a member of the legislative council in Bombay and the years of 1927-1929 were particularly relevant in his effort at generating communal hostilities between Hindus and Muslims in Godhra. In the police confidential reports, Mukadam is depicted as 'a pugnacious and pernicious fellow and apparently out for trouble with the Muhammadans'.<sup>50</sup> In this way, his involvement in inciting people in the Ganapati procession that took place in August 1927 in Godhra showed his commitment in the production of hostilities on the basis 'to defend his own people against aggression':

At Godhra the immersion ceremony took place on the 5<sup>th</sup>. I have since had complaints from some of the Muhammadans (Ganchis) that W.S. Mukadam tried to provoke them by halting the procession in front of one of the mosques, playing cymbals, and even brandishing a revolver. The D.S.P. is enquiring about this and I am awaiting his report before taking any action. I spoke to Mukadam a short time ago about his apparent anti-Muhammadan attitude and he then assured me that the last thing he wanted was to create any trouble between the two communities here, though

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<sup>47</sup> Conversation with Arun Vaghela, Ahmedabad, February 2011.

<sup>48</sup> Mama Saheb Phadke, *Autobiography*. p. 63.

<sup>49</sup> Arun Vaghela, 'Vamanrao Mukadam'.

<sup>50</sup> Home Department Special Note. W S Mukadam, HDSB, 355 (59)A VIII, 1927, p. 75. MSA (B).

determined to defend his own people against aggression. The Ganpati incident, if true, is hard to reconcile with this assurance. Meanwhile he is cordially hated by most of the local Muhammadans.<sup>51</sup>

The Ghanchi Muslims were a community apparently notorious for their combativeness.<sup>52</sup> This group was relatively prosperous as several Muslim sects in Gujarat such as Memons, Borahs and Khojas dedicated to commercial activities which made them wealthier and less illiterate than their coreligionists in other parts of India.<sup>53</sup> Ghanchi Muslims' rival group were the banias or merchants, both of them competitive in trade-related activities.<sup>54</sup> Muslims were not a homogeneous community and conflict was latent even within the different Islamic sects, for instance, in 1940 there was a dispute between the Ghanchis and the Kazis of Godhra over leading the prayers at the Idgah in Bakri Id. There was no arrangement between both groups, thus prayer offering was banned that year.<sup>55</sup> Apart from revealing the heterogeneity of Muslim community, this episode undermines the idea of unity among Muslims that Hindu organisations constantly alluded to as opposed to Hindu disunity which supposedly made them more vulnerable before Muslims.

On the other hand, the Ghanchi Muslims were supporters of the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha utilized this situation to create aversion against them in Godhra.<sup>56</sup> In addition, from the beginning of the twentieth century both groups were gradually alienated from each other by embracing 'fundamentalist values

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<sup>51</sup> Extract from the confidential weekly letter of the District Magistrate, Panch Mahals, for the week ending 24<sup>th</sup> August 1927, Home Department Special Note, W S Mukadam, HDSB, 355 (59)A VIII, 1927, p. 1. MSA (B).

<sup>52</sup> Ali Asghar Engineer, 'Communal Riots in Godhra: A Report', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 16 (1981), pp. 1638-1640. [consulted at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4370319>].

<sup>53</sup> Nagindas Sanghavi, *Gujarat at Cross-Roads* (Mumbai: 2010), p. 10-11.

<sup>54</sup> David Hardiman, 'Passing blame on Godhra Muslims', p. 1785.

<sup>55</sup> Idgah Dispute at Godhra. Order under section 144, Criminal Procedure Code, issued in connection with idgah dispute at Godhra prohibiting two factions of Muslims from going to or remaining in the Idgah on Id days. HDSB, file 566-D, 1938-1942. MSA (B).

<sup>56</sup> Ali Asghar Engineer, 'Communal Riots in Godhra: A Report', p. 1638.

as a means to legitimise their local rivalry –the ghanchis purifying their Islam and the banyas moving towards the Hindu Mahasabha’.<sup>57</sup>

Mukadam took advantage of the Ghanchis stereotype and by means of his publication, the *Vir Garjana* (Roar of the Brave), reinforced the negative image of this Muslim sector. His publication was an effort at keeping ‘alive Hindu-Muslim hostility in Godhra by a campaign of persistent vilification of the Ghanchis in particular’.<sup>58</sup> However the militancy of the Ghanchis was not necessarily a rumour, this was proved in 1928, during a Jain procession in September 1928 where the majority Ghanchi community opposed music before a mosque:

On the 17<sup>th</sup> there were rumours that the Jains intended to play music while passing two mosques. These rumours led to resentment among section of the Muhammadan community who decided in the event of their proving to be true to lead a counter cow procession along the same route and then slaughter the animal. Another rumour was that Mr. W.S. Mukadam. M.L.C., who had led a Gujarati procession a month before and played music in it before a mosque, also proposed to take out a procession. On hearing of this, the Muhammadans painted three cows and placed them near two mosques and near Mr. Mukadam’s house.<sup>59</sup>

In this sense, the increasing confrontation between Hindu and Muslim communities in Godhra was evident and the newspapers of the period contributed to strengthen the pejorative communities’ perceptions of each other producing further hostilities. The press of these years was less restrained and temperate and the ‘method of attacking and ridiculing each other’s religious beliefs and practices had eventually increased to such an extent, especially in Sind and a section of the Gujarati press in Bombay city and Ahmedabad, that Government found it necessary in October 1924 to issue a Press Note pointing out that the campaign of wild accusations, of vulgar and even obscene abuse and inflammatory attacks on the morals and religious beliefs of each, as were

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<sup>57</sup> David Hardiman, ‘Passing the blame’, p. 1785 .

<sup>58</sup> Home Department Special Note W S Mukadam, HDSB, 355 (59)A VIII, 1927, p. 81. MSA (B).

<sup>59</sup> Indian Statutory Commission. Hindu-Moslem relation. 1) Note on Hindu Moslem relation prepared for the Statutory Commission. 2) Note on Hindu Moslem relation and movement of a subversive character since September 1928, HDSB, file 143 K (b). MSA (B).

deliberately published by both factions, were likely to lead to outbreaks of bloodshed and murder...'<sup>60</sup>.

An article entitled 'The Gundaism of the Ghanchis' published in the *Hindu*, stated that

...oppressive acts continue to be perpetrated against the Hindus of Godhra. The Government officers are for the most part Muslims, wherefore, there is being established Muslim Raj instead of British Rule. Attacks are being made on respectable women bathing at the river. They, (Muslims) create a row in shops while paying the price after buying goods. The heads of Hindus are being broken. On the roads it is the reign of the fakirs and Musalmans that prevails. The ornaments of girls passing along the roads are being looted. Parts of the body such as the ear and nose, are being wrenched away. Looting, bloodshed and violence and stray attacks continue to take place. The life of Mr. Vaman Mukadam is in danger. Muslim thieves get into shops for committing thefts, and on being caught, the Muslims make a free use of lathis and dharias on the Hindus.<sup>61</sup>

This publication, *Hindu*, was started by Manantrai Raiji who became an important Hindu leader as the president of the Surat Congress Committee. From being a Congress member, he changed his affiliation and joined the Mahasabha ranks. In this platform, Raiji 'led the Hindu Mahasabha processions during the Shivaji Jayanti and Ganesh festivals in Surat, which turned into bloody riots.'<sup>62</sup> Thus, this was another instance of a Congress member joining the Mahasabha. This poses the questions to what extent Congress members coincided truly with the Gandhian stance of ahimsa and to what extent the shifting and more belligerent social conditions shaped the Congress stance towards a more incredulous position on non-violence, if not of the whole party, at least, several of its members.

In spite of this turbulent scenario, 'Wamanrao availed himself of [the] opportunity for preaching his creed of physical force. He exhorted the audience to

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Report on a newspaper cutting from the *Hindu*, Home Department Special Note W S Mukadam. Home Department Special Branch, 355 (59)A VIII, 1927, p. 45. MSA (B).

<sup>62</sup> Yagnik and Sheth, *The Shaping of Modern Gujarat*, p. 214.



give up cowardice, to keep *lathis* and *dharias* [billhooks] in their houses.’<sup>63</sup> This kind of confrontational content is insidious in his rhetoric that was effectively disseminated through his recurrent delivery of public speeches. The Jummadada Gymnastic Institute or *akhada* of Manekrao in Baroda city as mentioned, commonly hosted meetings that promoted anti-Muslim feelings. On the 20 March 1929 Mukadam himself appeared in Manekrao’s gymnasium to explain the purpose of the Mahasabha. According to official reports:

He pointed out that the Sabha was not established with the intention of waging war against the non-Hindu religionist but it has been done so with the pious motive of bridging over differences which existed between the different castes and creeds of the Hindu Community. In short he said that under the auspices of the Hindu Mahasabha and its branches all over India, the organizers of this institution wished to wake up the Hindoo Community from her fatal slumber of inactivity and thereby enable her to walk with an erect neck against all other religionists who openly professed to crush the religion as a whole.<sup>64</sup>

Mukadam had the conviction that Hindu society had to be prepared to deploy an effective defence through direct confrontation. This is what he advised people. Consistent with this, Mukadam emphasized the need for opening *akhadas* ‘in all towns and villages’ because of ‘the inability of the Hindus and... [because] they were cowards... [In contrast] the Mussalmans were united and took care to protect themselves.’<sup>65</sup> As seen above, the idea of unity was a misconception, as the Muslims of Godhra also squabbled amongst themselves, often with great vehemence.

The effectiveness of physical training as a successful ‘defence’ is difficult to be fairly measured but according to activists of the Arya Samaj, the opening of

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<sup>63</sup> Extract from the confidential diary of the District Superintendent of Police, Panch-Mahals, for the week ending May 26, 1928. Home Department Special Note W S Mukadam. HDSB, 355 (59)A VIII, 1927 p. 75. MSA (B).

<sup>64</sup> Confidential report on Vamanrao Mukadam for the period ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 1929, CD, p. 523. BRO (VG).

<sup>65</sup> Report on a meeting held in the local jubilee Baug in commemoration of the National Week, 13<sup>th</sup> April 1929, Confidential report for the period ending 30<sup>th</sup> April 1929, CD, no. 17, p. 551-553. BRO (VG).

akhadas had brought 'good' results. In a meeting of the Arya Samaj in 1928 –the same years of Mukadam's campaign in Gujarat— one of its members, Swami Paramanand, referred 'that last year when a riot took place in Surat the local Hindus got battoned at the hands of the Mohmedans, but he (lecturer) since then opened four gymnasiums and as a result this year during the recent riots the Mohmedans got sufficient hammerings at the hands of the Hindus.'<sup>66</sup> According to this information the physical strength acquired by Hindus with the opening of akhadas had fulfilled the purpose of establishing this kind of centres, that is, to teach a lesson to Muslims. Therefore, in the light of this episode, Muslims had received what they deserved, being hammered at the hands of Hindus. The Arya Samaj, on its part, was an organization committed to the same principles of the Hindu Mahasabha and shuddhi and Hindu Sanghathan at the end were aspects of a common agenda.

Conversely, it is interesting to look at a different opinion on the opening of akhadas and its effect in communities' relations. Thus 'the Dy. Supdt. of Police, N.D., Ahmedabad... reported that Hindu-Muslim relation, which has previously been cordial, became strained as a result of the opening of a branch of the Hindu Maha Sabha... The opening of Akhadas... by Hindus also contributed to the growth of suspicion.'<sup>67</sup> Beyond the perception that the Hindu Mahasabha activism was pernicious to social structure, the opinions of the Arya Samaj and the superintendent coincided about the fact that establishing akhadas had produced more hostilities. But this was considered positive in the case of the Samaj that rejoiced in Hindus beating Muslims. By contrast, the authority's stance was that this was not helpful in relaxing the tension between communities.

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<sup>66</sup> Meeting of the Arya Samaj in Dalia Pole, Baroda, 12<sup>th</sup> October 1928, Confidential Report for the period ending the 14<sup>th</sup> October 1928. Baroda District, CD, p. 355. BRO (VG).

<sup>67</sup> Memorial of the Viramgam incident, Communal Tension and Incidents in Bombay Province (Gujarat Region), HDSB, file no. 844, Pt. II, p. 341. MSA (B).

On the other hand, elaborating further on the physical training issue, in Mukadam's conviction there was no gender differentiation for achieving this purpose, both men and women were required to be prepared. This way, 'he asked the women to wear daggers'. This suggestion constituted a parallel position with the one of other Hindu Mahasabha member, B.S. Moonje who, while being president of the Hindu Mahasabha, also toured Gujarat several times during the same years Mukadam campaigned there. Moonje was even more emphatic in advising the feminine sector about the measures to be taken for their protection, this way he pointed out that 'the Muhammadans carry away any beautiful Hindu women and rape them. He, therefore, advised them to carry hunting knives with them and learn how to use them in case of an attempt to outrage their modesty. He asked them to set up gymnasia where women could be trained in the use of the knife.'<sup>68</sup>

Mukadam's theoretical formulations then, strongly backed up by his disposition to action crystallized in his eagerness to create conflict. This was clear in the Ganapati procession of 1927 where he provocatively halted a group of people and encouraged them to keep playing music before the mosque while he brandished a gun jeopardizing not only the physical integrity of Muslims but also the security of the Hindu processionists. In this same line of behaviour, his advice to women for keeping daggers with them is executed with his arrangements for providing with knives to different social sectors. Thus, 'Mr. Waman Mukadam, a member elected by the people of the Panch Mahals to represent them in the Legislative Council of our local Government of Bombay, has imported from the Punjab the weapons called Kirpans

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<sup>68</sup> Speech by Dr. Balkrishna S. Moonje in Broach, 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1927, B.S. Moonje, HDSB, file no. 355 (59), A-VII. MSA (B).

[sic] which have acquired notoriety in the Punjab and which can be used for committing man-slaughter.’<sup>69</sup>

By reviewing his ideology, his debatable activities and sometimes, his direct aggressions, it is clear that Vamanrao Mukadam was a highly fanatic activist. His readiness for confrontation and his provoking of conflict was a key to the development of communal hostility between Hindus and Muslims in Gujarat. The confidential reports unequivocally support this fact: ‘There can, I think, be no reasonable doubt that the present disturbance at Godhra is due to the irritation given and provocation offered to the Mahomedans by Mr. Wamanrao Mukadam and his supporters.’<sup>70</sup>

On the other hand, much of the hostility on the part of the members of the Muslim community in Godhra was directed against Mukadam and his associates, rather than the Hindu community of the town as a whole. According to a report by a local official, who was a Hindu:

There is no real enmity between the Hindus and Mahomedans here. We (Hindus) are perfectly safe. We can move out anywhere. There is no danger of any disturbance. Mr. Wamanrao Mukadam has got a rough tongue, and has irritated these people, and has written against them. The only persons who have got any thing to fear are Mr. Wamanrao and Dr. Maneklal. Other Hindus are perfectly safe. Really at heart the Mahomedans have no enmity with the other Hindus.<sup>71</sup>

Thus it is clear that Vamanrao Mukadam did not voice the feelings of the Hindu community and some of its sectors absolutely disagreed with his belligerence against Muslims.

It was in this context that Mukadam’s actions and animadversion were reciprocated by members of Muslim community. Thus, unambiguously Mukadam’s

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<sup>69</sup> *Insaf*, 21 October 1927, Home Department Special Note W.S. Mukadam, HDSB, file 355(59) A VIII, p. 51. MSA (B).

<sup>70</sup> Confidential H.M.D. Godhra, 30<sup>th</sup> September 1928. Home Department Special Note W.S. Mukadam, HDSB, file 355(59) A VIII, p. 83. MSA (B).

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*.

anti-Islamic stance made him to be a 'natural' target of Muslim's enmity up to the point 'that if there were any trouble he would be one of the first victims.'<sup>72</sup> And he actually was. When leaving Godhra he and his associates were intercepted and attacked. The circumstances of the aggression on him are not quite clear. We are told that Mukadam left for Baroda in the morning of the 30<sup>th</sup> September 1928 and that 'he is believed to be on his way to Poona to see H.E. the Governor. He and one elderly man were the only two of the injured persons left in the Civil Hospital up to yesterday.'<sup>73</sup> Undoubtedly, it was an unfortunate aggression but probably it could have been the result of his own doctrine of retaliation which reached the most exacerbated point in his declaration that "murder can only be avenged by murder."<sup>74</sup>

On the other hand, this kind of extremism was not intrinsic to Mukadam, his confrontational attitude was seen among other members of the Mahasabha, such as B.S. Moonje and V.S. Savarkar, both of them presidents of the organization. These two figures were pioneers in producing such deeply anti-Muslim representation; therefore they strongly supported the militarization of Hindus and the Hinduization of politics in order that Hindus could defend themselves from Muslim historical aggressions according to their perspective.

Moonje toured Ahmedabad in 1928 while president of the Hindu Mahasabha, and in his speeches of this period he still appealed to the Mapilla rebellion of 1921 in a meeting held in this city to illustrate the atrocities committed on Hindus by Muslims:

He said that he had been working as a Congressman for the last 25 years but because of certain incidents had been obliged to join the communal movement. Gandhi had tried to introduce nationalism according to his views, but he had been unsuccessful.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>74</sup> Report on a meeting in Bulsar, near Surat, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1929, Home Department Special Note W.S. Mukadam, HDSB, file 355(59) A VIII, p. 125. MSA (B).

The Malabar riots had come as a great shock to Hindus. The Moplahs thinking that British rule had ceased to exist and that the Khilafat raj had come into being, had broken out in rebellion and forcibly converted 3000 Hindus to Muhammadanism, outraged Hindu women and defiled their temples.<sup>75</sup>

That Moonje was part of the Congress for 25 year reinforces the fact that the party had an open door for the entrance of all kind of political tendencies, including the extremism whether embodied in the figure of Malaviya, Moonje, K.M. Munshi or Savarkar. From his extremist position, Moonje's political stance was totally anti-Gandhian. The Mahasabhaite activism proposed a belligerent posture to face, mainly, the empowerment of the Muslim community but also the foreign rule, although in a marginal way. The conviction of physical preparedness implied a natural rejection of Gandhism, an aspect that is more than evident in Moonje's ideological considerations. For the Mahasabhaite, Gandhism was considered to be an inimical tendency with its promotion of ahimsa or non-violence, since the supposed inability of Hindus for fighting or 'self-defence' or their pacifist tendency was to be blamed for Hindus being crushed at Muslim hands. Ahimsa, then, was an obvious antithesis of the militancy the Mahasabha advocated and disseminated. Not only Moonje but other leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha were specific when stating that there was 'only one way of making India strong militarily and that is through compulsory military education... [and that] gangsterism in international politics could be stopped only by war'.<sup>76</sup>

In addition, Moonje's discourse also promoted the stereotypical ideas within Hindu nationalist rhetoric that 'Muhammadanism' stood for forced conversion, temple desecration and dishonouring of Hindu women. In this understanding, one of his most active campaigns was for the opening of a military school in Nagpur, a city

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<sup>75</sup> Report on B.S. Moonje in Ahmedabad in May 1928, B.S. Moonje, HDSB, file 355(59) A-VII. MSA (B).

<sup>76</sup> Declaration by V.C. Desphande, General Secretary of the All India Hindu Mahasabha, The Bombay Chronicle, 28<sup>th</sup> October 1950. Indian Proscribed Literature, reel 2, account no. 1842. Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Delhi. From now on NMML (D).

in Maharashtra. In consequence, in 1935 Moonje once again campaigned in Ahmedabad to raise funds for establishing his military school, a project that showed his biased thinking anew by emphasizing that such a school was going to be specific for physical training of Hindu youths:

I have nothing to say than that you should make your contribution conditional upon being spent on training of Hindu boys alone in indigenous exercises for physical development and arts of self-defence and in military drill and rifle practice. We must see that in future when we open up such institutions and spend money on them, they are meant for Hindus alone. No non-Hindu should be allowed to take advantage of them. False sentiments of Hindu-Moslem unity should not be allowed to prevail in such matters.... Equally, I would give preference to the Indigenous Arts of self-defence such as Lathi... sword, dagger, etc. Along with this every encouragement should be given to the Hindu boys for training in military drill and rifle practice. ...The proposed gymnasium should have two branches, one for the girls and one for the boys. Women teachers should be trained and as far as possible girls should have women trainers alone.<sup>77</sup>

There is an emphasis in pointing out that Hindus and Muslims could not be together in a project like this, given that physical training was supposed to be provided to confront Muslim 'goondas'. Moreover there is also the formulation of a non differentiated training, both men and women should be physically prepared; as stated above, Moonje recommended women to take knives with them and use them effectively.

As in the case of Mukadam, Moonje's potential to create conflict was also perceived by the authorities of Gujarat. His activities were investigated by governmental agents and, under their recommendation he was banned from delivering and attending any public speeches in Surat in May 1927:

Whereas it has come to my notice that you are to attend or address a public meeting in Surat City during your stay and whereas it appears to me that there is communal tension in Surat at present:-  
In order to prevent the disturbance of the public peace, I.K.L. Panjabi, Esq., District Magistrate, Surat, do hereby order you Dr. B. S. Moonje, under Section 144 C. P.

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<sup>77</sup> Letter from B.S. Moonje to Mansukhlal Chhanganlal Desai, 17<sup>th</sup> June 1929, Munshi Private Papers, reel, 18, file 14, p. 95. NMML(D)

Code to abstain from attending or addressing any Public Meeting in Surat City or in any spot within five miles radius of Surat City.<sup>78</sup>

That year Surat had witnessed some tension between Hindus and Muslims, the situation before Moonje's arrival was sensitive and given his fervent anti-Muslim rhetoric, he was ordered by the district magistrate of Surat, not to participate in public acts, whether attending or addressing a public meeting. It is worth underlining his defiant attitude against this order, as he delivered a speech in open violation of it in which he stated that:

The Hindoo Maha Sabha wants the Hindoos to... consolidate its strength and also add to its numbers by removing untouchability and popularizing Suddhi movement. This Hindoo Maha Sabha movement means no harm to any community. He also added that none of his speeches are intended to offend anybody but on the other hand [*sic*] Hindoo cannot be too grateful to their Muslim Brethren for the rousing stimulus they are applying to the sleepy-letargic [*sic*] orthodox Hindoos for self improvement, and Sangathan.<sup>79</sup>

One of the most relevant aspects in his speech is the idea of untouchability's eradication. Untouchability, in Moonje's discourse as in the foundational discourse of the organization in 1923, was considered to be inimical to Hindu community because it diminished its strength; then there is the promotion for removing untouchability but it is not related to humanitarian reasons. There is no important concern for the oppression of these groups even if Mahasabhaite rhetoric sometimes made direct allusion to it. The project of bringing the untouchables within the Hindu fold was motivated by a desire to strengthen the Hindu community in its combat with Muslims.

It is important to notice that these extremist figures were not always welcome in more temperate Hindu circles. It was reported that in Surat 'almost all the

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<sup>78</sup> Report on Moonje's public meeting in Surat. B.S. Moonje, HDSB, file 355(59) A-VII, p. 35. MSA (B).

<sup>79</sup> Report on Moonje's public meeting in Surat. B.S. Moonje, HDSB, file 355(59) A-VII, p. 39. MSA (B).



responsible Hindu were opposed to Dr. Moonje's addressing a public meeting... As a protest against the decision to hold a public meeting two prominent members of the Managing Committee of the Hindu Sabha had publicly resigned.'<sup>80</sup> As seen with Mukadam and his highly aggressive behaviour, there were Hindu sectors rejecting this kind of provocations to Muslims at the hands of Mahasabhaite members and even within the organization itself there was no general backing of such extremist and irresponsible activities. Nevertheless, even if there were such divergent voices, the impact on Muslim opinion by the campaign of these hardline Mahasabha leaders remains undisputed.

On the other hand, the members of the organization were not only exhaustive in denouncing what they thought to be the problematic with Muslim community; they also proposed some measures aimed at 'solving' this situation. Thus 'Dr. Munje stated that Hindus should not be afraid of Mahomedans as they were originally Hindus of India and gave an example of the treatment of the Jews at the hands of the Nazis in Germany.'<sup>81</sup> The suggestion is unmistakable, namely that Muslims should be treated similarly to the Jews by the Nazis.

In direct correspondence with this, Savarkar, president of the Hindu Mahasabha from 1937, had a similar position towards Muslims. The governmental reports show that 'there is a school of thought in India which holds that Hindustan belongs to the Hindus and that Muslims should be driven out of India as the Jews are driven out of Germany [which] is borne out by the declarations made in recent months by several Hindu Maha Sabha leaders, including Mr. V.D. Savarkar, the President of

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<sup>80</sup> Confidential report on Moonje's participation in public speech. B.S. Moonje, HDSB, file 355(59) A-VII, p. 61. MSA (B).

<sup>81</sup> Extract from the Weekly Confidential Report of the District Magistrate, Belgaum, no. E.C., 19<sup>th</sup> September 1935, Military School, B.S. Moonje, HDSB, file no. 812-A, p. 89. MSA (B).

the Maha Sabha.<sup>82</sup> In these elaborations there is admiration for National Socialism in Germany. Hitler's political actuation and other fascists representatives like Mussolini are rather paradigmatic for the Mahasabha leadership.<sup>83</sup> The natural inference of this notion is the possibility of religious cleansing by getting rid of the Islamic sector of the population through its displacement from India.<sup>84</sup> However this is an ambiguous 'solution' given the tough opposition against the idea of Pakistan which in a way implied the eradication of the Muslim population from India but on the basis of the loss of Indian territory.

Savarkar held that 'the survival of the fittest [was] the rule',<sup>85</sup> explaining his obsession with physical training, but this was thought within Islamist circles as well. The contestation to Mahasabha's campaigning in Gujarat is interesting and distressing, because a quite belligerent attitude also underlies the reply to Hindus. The very assault on Mukadam is one of these unfortunate reactions but in a more organized way. Meetings and mobilizations were taking place to defend the Muslim community from the Hindu majority.

Hakim Mavalana Taj Mahomed Khan spoke at length on the life of the Holy Prophet and then said: "The Kaffirs of India make allegations against the Prophet of Islam and you Musalmans tolerate it ... Everywhere in India people are taught how to play with sticks and swords, morning and evening, to ruin you. You are sleeping and not coming to your senses. I do not tell you a lie, but a resolution has been passed by the Hindu Maha Sabha to destroy eight crores of Musalmans. You should also prepare your children in the same way and prepare them for the occasion. Your forefathers who spread Islam in the world were not afraid of death... You can punish with your own hands those persons who attack your Prophet or other old religious persons. In doing so we might go to jail for some time for it. It is not a matter of regret if Taj Mahomed goes to jail for the sake of religion. I pray to God to take me to him after I become a Sahid (to be killed in the religious cause)!"<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Speeches by Hindu Maha Sabha 1939-1940. HDSB, file no. 1009. F 245, p. 11. MSA (B).

<sup>83</sup> For a detailed analysis on the influence of National Socialism on Hindu nationalism see Chetan Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism. Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths*.

<sup>84</sup> In Savarkar's ideology there is a notion of racism, but racism by domination and not a biological one. For a further elaboration of this idea see Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement*, p. 29-30.

<sup>85</sup> V.D. Savarkar, "Presidential Address at the 19<sup>th</sup> Session of the All India Hindu Mahasabha" in Savarkar, *Hindu Sanghathan*, p. 36.

<sup>86</sup> Copy of the report of the Sub-Inspector of Police to District Superintendent of Police, Ahmedabad, 17<sup>th</sup> April 1925, Information on pamphlets and speeches. HDSB, file no. 355(25) D, p. 27. MSA (B).

As mentioned lines above, this particular belligerent stance on the Muslim side produced fear on Hindu sectors and became one aspect in the series of justifications for Hindu hostility towards Islam. But it is worth noticing that this attitude is also responsive to Hindu militant activism. Thus, both aggressive nationalisms influenced each other and promoted open confrontation that, clearly in this rhetoric, would only give continuity to the old story of community enmity.

The next chapter will go on to explore the increasing tensions in Gujarat in 1937-1941. In this period, the several communal hostilities were notorious by the high participation of Arya Samaj and Mahasabha's leaders in boosting people's animosities particularly under the lines of music before mosques and cow slaughter which at first sight were the motivations for violence but which in more realistic terms were episodes the Samaj and the Sabha profited from to detonate broader conflicts between communities.

## Chapter four

### Communal violence in Gujarat 1937-1941

In 1941 there was a riot between Hindus and Muslims in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, that represented the culmination of a period of growing tension between these communities starting at least in 1937. At a political level, the Congress formed a ministry in Bombay Presidency, and in municipalities such as Ahmedabad they maintained their overwhelming majority. This caused increasing tension with the Muslim League under the leadership of Jinnah. In this atmosphere, the contending issues were some recurrent ones: the playing of music before mosques and cow slaughter, facts and arguments that both Hindus and Muslims defended respectively as their motivations for violence, not only in this episode but in other riots that had broken out underpinned by these supposed facts. In this sense, colonial statistics of violence revealed exacerbated religious feelings behind riots and later in contemporary periods, one of the most frequent explanations in the outbreak of violence is still the reference to the recrudescence of religious animosities among the communities, a version that embodies a particular kind of teleology when looking at the history of the subcontinent leading to a narrative of perennial antagonistic religious-based feelings.<sup>1</sup>

This is a simplistic way of explaining communal violence for other fundamental factors have to be carefully examined. As Paul Brass theorizes there is a clear dichotomy when scrutinizing Hindu-Muslim riots: ‘those who attribute collective violence primarily to the prejudices, hostilities, aggressions, and propensities to violence of particular peoples...

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<sup>1</sup> Even nowadays in 2010 there were some disturbances in Ahmedabad and Hyderabad, and the explanation for the clashes between communities was stated as having a religious base. See for instance ‘Curfew follows Hyderabad riots’, Aljazeera English, 30 March 2010, at <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/asia/2010/03/201033082643997593.html> where the chronicle for this incident deals with the competition for controlling the public space in religious festivals as the main motivation behind this outbreak of violence between Hindus and Muslims.

and those who argue... that one must look elsewhere for explanations of violence not only to other causes but in strategies of crowd mobilization.<sup>2</sup> Rather complementary, it is my contention that these aspects are however contradictory. This is not to say that there is an intrinsic religious animosity among communities in India, although there had been circumstances and events that were taken advantage of by different actors in order to create and perpetuate this animosity. When studying these kinds of episodes both dimensions should be taken in consideration; on the one hand, the underlying motivations or factors behind these episodes, as well as the immediate supposed causes –whether the playing of music, rumours of kidnapping of Hindu or Muslim girls by the opposite community, the slaughter of sacred animals, the closing of Muslim graveyards or the government’s supposed appeasement to majority or minority community. And on the other, there is the political culture of the context in which a riot takes place. In this latter aspect, the role of political actors, both individual and collective is crucial along with their mechanisms to mobilize people.

Thus, this chapter seeks to analyse the increasing community tension from 1939 to 1941 in Ahmedabad between Hindus and Muslims on the ground of a dispute over Hindus playing music in their procession before a mosque and the Muslims retaliating, in turn, by slaughtering a cow and distributing its meat among poor people. The aim is to use this as a case study to shed light on the way a communal episode is articulated and represented, and to examine how the Hindu nationalists figured in all this. In what ways did they represent the Muslims? What allegations did they make about specific Muslim actions? What counter-tactics did they demand and propagate? How did contemporaries seek to explain the riots?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Brass, *The production of Hindu-Muslim violence in contemporary India* (Seattle and London: 2003), p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

How did commissions of inquiry perhaps determine the way that the rioting was understood?<sup>4</sup>

These are the sort of questions we shall be asking in this chapter.

### Communal rioting in Gujarat in the years preceding 1941

In the 1920s and 1930s there were a whole series of communal riots in Gujarat. There were outbreaks in Dakor (Kheda district) in October 1922; Mandal (Ahmedabad district) March 1925; Patri (Ahmedabad district) July 1925; Surat May 1927; Mehmedabad (Kheda district) August 1927; Ahmedabad, September 1927; Godhra September 1928, Surat 1928, Dhandhuka (Ahmedabad district) April 1939; Ahmedabad, 1941, Surat April 1941.<sup>5</sup> The period of these disturbances corresponds to the last phase of colonialism in India. The ‘tradition’ of riots in the region is apparent but if these events have any continuity from a pre-colonial period is yet to be elucidated.<sup>6</sup> However the outbreak of dozens of these episodes during the colonial period is undeniable and is an important aspect in the process of history writing of the Indian past by colonial and Indian authors.<sup>7</sup>

One of these confrontations occurred on the 24<sup>th</sup> of September 1939. There was a dispute between the Hindus and Muslims of Dhandhuka over the performance of some religious rituals. But the problem had its antecedents in 1937. The disagreement of that year was over the playing of music in a Hindu procession when passing by the Daudi Borah

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> Booklet on Relations and causes of communalism. Chapter V. Hindu-Moslem Tension. Appendix ‘A’, Statement of communal disorders, Hindu-Moslem disorders 1921-1927. Indian Statutory Commission Hindu-Muslim relations. 1) note on Hindu Muslim relations prepared for the S.C. 2) Note on Hindu Muslim relations and movement of a subversive character since September 1923 prepared for the Reform Officer. HDSB, 143 K(b), 1928, p. 267-273. MSA (B).

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed debate on the trajectory of religious antagonism in the subcontinent see C. A. Bayley, ‘The Pre-history of ‘communalism’? Religious conflict in India, 1700-1860’, *Modern South Asian Studies*, 19 (1985). p. 177-203. [consulted at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/312153>].

<sup>7</sup> Gyanendra Pandey, *The construction of communalism in North India*, p. 2.

mosque. Given the petition of Muslim leaders, a compromise had been taken by Hindus of playing only soft music outside the mosque but at the end Hindus gave up playing music while trying to preserve good community relations.<sup>8</sup> Thus in spite of the differences, there was no major inconvenience or conflict during this celebration.

In Ahmedabad City itself, there was also increasing communal tension in July 1938 over a measure by the Municipality to close an apparently 400 year old Muslim graveyard known as Pir Kamal's Qabiristan located near the Ellis Bridge area. This fact aroused a huge controversy and alerted sectors of the Muslim community in Ahmedabad who marched against the measure.<sup>9</sup> The arguments advanced by the Muslims at that time were that the motivations behind the Municipal decision were political in order to accomplish the wishes of privileged Hindus who had bought their bungalows in the neighbourhood nearby the graveyard. Apparently this decision was being implemented with the auspices of the Congress and the mobilization of Muslim sectors was being led by the Muslim League. Whether this allegation was true or false, an actual fact in these years is that after the elections of 1937, the Muslim League revitalised itself by winning an important amount of seats both in Bombay and the United Provinces and if in Bombay the Congress had won 87 seats it still needed one other seat to form the ministry. Jinnah offered a coalition ministry but Vallabhbhai Patel's position was merging the League with the Congress as a condition. Needless to say, the negotiations broke down.<sup>10</sup> In Ahmedabad the tension increased because of this situation and it was evident even in simple actions undertaken by the Congress, for

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<sup>8</sup> Reply to the Memorial submitted by the Ahmedabad District Muslim League. Home Department (Political). Poona, 24<sup>th</sup> October 1940. Communal tension and incidents in Bombay province (Gujarat region), HDSB, no. 844, part II. MSA (B).

<sup>9</sup> Issues around burial grounds were at some point recurrently problematic, in Surat there was conflict when in 1913 a bylaw restricted against overcrowding of cemeteries and for the registration of all burials. Muslim sectors thought that their practice of burying their dead was in danger. See Douglas Haynes, *Rhetoric and Ritual*, p. 263.

<sup>10</sup> Yagnik and Sheth, *The Shaping of Modern Gujarat*, p. 217.

instance, naming bridges after representative figures of the Congress was strongly opposed by the Muslim League.<sup>11</sup>

The closing of Pir Kamal's burial ground was inevitably seen as a political manoeuvre and caused deterioration in the relationship between the communities to such an extent that it was said to be one of the still unsolved disputes when the riot of 1941 broke out.<sup>12</sup> Thus local issues turned into quarrels between the political parties claiming to represent the two major communities as it is shown in this case with the Congress supporting the closure of Pir Kamal's and the Muslim League fighting the measure. This fact tainted the conflicts as being specifically communal and as having an exclusive religious dimension.

The year of 1939 was also problematic in the Gujarat region. There were several differences between the communities. In April, for instance, there was a demonstration of Muslims from Godhra because the Hindu Vice-President had made pejorative remarks about them regarding their supposed 'lack of sanitary habits'. Thus according to confidential reports for Broach and the Panch Mahals districts some 2000 Muslims had gathered at the Municipal hall in Godhra to protest this negative depiction by the vice-president who ended by resigning his post.<sup>13</sup>

August also recorded some confrontational episodes for the communities. There was another incident in Viramgam, near Ahmedabad. Some Hindu newspapers reported that Muslim 'goondas played jokes' on Hindu women and that some Muslims had attacked a Hindu gymnast. As a result of these reports from *Sandesh* and *Nav Sarashtra* –Muslims

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>12</sup> Confidential correspondence to the District Magistrate, dated the 5<sup>th</sup> May 1941. Hindu-Muslim riots, Bombay and Ahmedabad, 1941. HDSB, 844-H-VIII. p. 65. MSA (B).

<sup>13</sup> Extract from the weekly confidential report of the District Magistrate, Broach and Panch Mahals, dated the 13<sup>th</sup> April 1939. Communal tension and incidents in Bombay province (Gujarat region), HDSB, no. 844, Pt. II, p. 307. MSA (B).



argued— there had been attacks on their community's members. Apparently the day of the Viramgam episode on the 19<sup>th</sup> August 1939, some Muslim youths passing by a Hindu neighbourhood had a dispute with Hindus because they had used foul language. This difference led to a scuffle and a crowd of Hindu people armed with sticks, around 500 according to official figures, had gathered ready for confrontation but they were dispersed by the police inspector. However, three Hindus and two Muslims were injured but one of the Muslims died two days later because of his serious injuries.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover in 1939 the animosities revived and gained momentum over the issue of music before mosque once again. The 29<sup>th</sup> August there were some talks and arrangements for the procession of Ekadashi to be performed later in September. This time sectors of Muslim community objected to the playing of music not only before the Daudi Borah mosque as it had happened in 1937 but also before the Qureishi mosque and the Jamma Masjid situated along the route of the procession. In spite of the protests, unlike in 1937, the playing of music went on, thus the retaliatory action or reaction on the part of the Muslim community was the slaughter of a cow and the subsequent distribution of its meat among poor people on the 26<sup>th</sup> of September of that year. This event aggravated the animosity within the Hindu community. Even though this particular episode did not result in an outburst of violence both events produced inter-communal resentments leading to a widening alienation of both sectors. These prevailing conditions provided the context for the occurrence of the 1941 riot which indeed witnessed the dissemination of violence between the Hindu and Muslim communities again over the issue of procession and music before mosques. That year a Sikh procession was supposed to be held passing by a mosque on its route, but in order to oppose the procession which was said to be of around 200 Sikhs, 'thousands of Muslims gathered

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<sup>14</sup> Para. 1-4 of the memorial. Viramgam incident. Communal tension and incidents in Bombay province (Gujarat region), HDSB, 844, Pt. II, p. 341-342. MSA (B).

together in the Mosque at Manek-Chauk ,<sup>15</sup> that is, the Jamma Masjid under the pretext to offer Namaz there.

And according to Hindu versions, after coming out from the mosque they indulged themselves in attacking Hindus and their properties with the subsequent demand from the part of the Hindus that Muslim had to pay for all the damages caused to their properties. This way the riot of 1941 was to some extent the culmination of a period of tension in the relationship of both communities having as background the independence struggle where the antagonistic social sector in India was increasingly being identified with the Muslim community and their demand for Pakistan. The circulation of this kind of rhetoric facilitated a strong mobilization of the communities, which were actually encouraged to join the different associations and organisations following different political ideologies. Thus both Muslims and Hindus were being targeted by political bodies and organisations demanding a confrontational participation when joining their ranks. This period is particularly characterized by a broad campaign of figures from the Hindu Mahasabha, Arya Samaj, the Congress and the Muslim League that, as seen in other chapters, toured broadly in different regions of Gujarat creating an explosive atmosphere for the outburst of disturbances and taking these turbulences, in turn, as justification for opening branches of their organizations in several points in the state.

Then, in general, if it is true that conflicts over religious festivals or celebrations are the canonical official explanations for violence it is also true that they were not exclusive. However, the study of riots in a more realistic dimension is required since, as it has been stated above, at a superficial level, exacerbated religious passions have quite frequently been considered the moving force behind the disagreements. Under this perspective, religious

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<sup>15</sup> Note in The Cine-Sentinel (Fortnightly) 20-4-41. (Bombay). Hindu-Muslim riots, Bombay and Ahmedabad, 1941. HDSB, 844-H-VIII. p. 99. MSA (B).

feelings could come out of control at the minimal provocation mainly given by the controversy over the communities practicing openly their religious rituals and performances. This is evident in the colonial narratives of communal strife; plenty of examples are provided by official publications, gazetteers, censuses and confidential and police reports about these episodes. They not only referred to the religious animosities as the causal explanation for riots but in these terms they also saw the need to undertake the articulation of a normative dimension for the religious expression. For instance, every religious festival was preceded by edicts or laws passed assuming that a conflict would break out if the necessary measures were not taken in order to avoid it. The message was clear, that religion and social animosity were an incontrovertible binomial. But most important, this normative dimension reveals the government's perception of these phenomena as a mere question of 'law and order'. This understanding meant overlooking the influence of politicians in the actual outburst of violence and the implementation of real measures to counter it. It meant the essentialization of religion as something intrinsically inimical to society or at least, to oriental societies like the Indian in contrast to western societies where religion was supposed to be rational. Some of these organisations were followed or investigated but the documents show that the main motive for their investigation was their possible seditious activities rather than the communal ones.

Then, looking at these events in the light of essentialization is not only simplifying their complexity but also stereotyping the nature of the communities as if these could be calibrated in a monolithic way and as if a mere feature of deep religiosity were the only aspect shaping the community's identity and the reason for creating trouble and violence. Thus it is necessary to analyse what there is behind these episodes avoiding simplification. Because as a matter of fact, it was stated with some frequency that

trivial incidents were given exaggerated importance and a false communal significance in the Press and unfounded rumours were rife. According to the Distt. Magistrate, several small matters contributed to the development of tension. These were (a) the decision of the Municipality with a Hindu majority -to tax Muslim butchers, (b) the attempted “rescue” of a Hindu woman from her Muslim paramour by the Hindu Mission of Ahmedabad, (c) jealousy and rivalry between Hindu and Muslim Akhadas and (d) the rival activities of the Muslim League and the Hindu Maha Sabha.<sup>16</sup>

This last issue, a political hand in organizing social confrontation was frequently referred to as a motivation underpinning some disturbances. For instance, this was the interpretation given to the mobilization coming out of the decision of closing Pir Kamal’s Qabiristan. In a perception of this event the idea of a political hand is clear: ‘The procession has been organized by the Muslim League for political rather than religious reasons. The Muslim League feels that their influence is waning in Ahmedabad and many of their supporters have gone over to Congress. The procession is in the nature of a political stunt to get back some of their lost prestige.’<sup>17</sup> Then, administrators and some social sectors were quite aware, although sometimes intermittently, of the attempt at mobilizing the community as a political strategy but the problem is that there were no effective measures to counter this communal mobilization.

In the following section, we shall examine the deepening social crisis in the relationship of both communities. We shall pay particular attention on the role of Hindu organisations in the straight promotion of hostilities and confrontation and on the communities’ response to the rhetoric and mobilization encouraged by these political bodies. The idea is to explore the process by which a communal consciousness was embedded through the manipulation of some sensitive issues in social sectors and the impact this had on

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<sup>16</sup> Para. 1-4 of the memorial, Viramgam incident 1939, Communal tension and incidents in Bombay Province (Gujarat region), HDSB, 844, Pt. II, p. 341-342. MSA (B).

<sup>17</sup> Letter from G.G. Drewe, the Collector’s office to Mr. Munshi, dated the 9<sup>th</sup> of July 1938, Communal tension and incidents in Bombay province (Gujarat region), HDSB, no. 844, Pt. II, p. 10. MSA (B).

the coexistence of the Indian communities that in the first half of the twentieth century struggled in the public sphere to achieve common benefits as emergent political actors.

### The battle for 'narrativity' and explanation: official, Hindu and Muslim versions of violence

To elucidate the communities' understanding and participation in these events, it is significant to analyse the different narratives of the incidents, the contemporary complaints of the communities before the pertinent authorities and the official version of the incident itself in order to explain the way these episodes were being perceived and the way the political and social actors explained and justified their actuation, because every explanation embodies the possibility of validating the actions undertaken. By looking at these explanations and argumentative formations we will be able to appraise the extent a communal consciousness was being implanted and the mechanisms utilized in it. In this, the role of Hindu right organisations and Muslim political bodies is quite important since both the detonation and the explanations of violence were strategies for political mobilization on the ground of supposed perennial communal hostilities.

Despite the trivialization in explaining the causes and incidence of communal riots, for some witnesses and actors it was clear that there was a political motivation when producing a conflict. This is evident in the different reports of the events that expressed the view that party political rivalry was an important ingredient in the articulation of violence. As for Hindu political organisations such as the Hindu Mahasabha and the Arya Samaj there was also the identification of their role in sponsoring hostilities. On the part of Islam, there were also political bodies promoting confrontational stances, but analysing this aspect would require that we undertake a whole study in order to be fair to this phenomenon. That is why there has only been a peripheral reference to this point in this research.

The narrative of inter-communal riots was split in at least three parts: Hindu, Muslim and official versions. In the first place we will look at the official narration to have an ostensibly neutral version of the facts, since evidently the versions belonging to each community were intended to displace the blame on the other actor. On the other hand, the official account aimed at offering the conclusive evidence of facts and motivations for the disturbance by having established inquiry reports and by having calibrated the claims of the communities involved in the riots. At least, the evaluation of Muslim and Hindu versions of this episode was an effort to construct a more temperate and objective narration of the events. However at some point a simplistic explanation was articulated by merely emphasizing the inevitability of these riots branding the communities as religiously irrational to explain at a general level the motivations behind violence.

This way, according to the official narrative, the Dhandhuka episode of 1939 occurred when Muslim people complained because the Ekadashi procession was arranged to pass playing music before some mosques. As stated above, this had created divergence in 1937 as well, but there was a peaceful settlement of the dispute when Hindu leaders persuaded the processionists to give up playing music at all. In 1939 Muslim sectors complained again over the same issue, but they also objected to the playing of music before other two mosques different to the Bohra mosque. The procession took place against Muslim opinion and while this was going on:

a Muslim began to abuse the leader of the procession and two Muslim women rushed at the palkhi and tried to seize the idols. At the Jumma Masjid preparations were being made to slaughter a cow. The slaughter was prevented by the timely arrest and temporary detention of the four Muslim youths concerned in the preparations. The processionists who had failed to take out a music pass were not prosecuted as a considerable time had elapsed and efforts were being made to come to a settlement. In consequence of the slaughter of a cow in the Jumma Masjid two days later, Hindu feeling was roused and a boycott of Muslims was started at

Dhandhuka and Padana. Instructions were issued to the District Magistrate to prosecute persons from either side who were responsible for the disturbance.<sup>18</sup>

Apparently this incident was foundational in two aspects. On the one hand, it was said to be the first time that music before mosques was played and on the other, it was the first time that a cow had been slaughtered in Dhandhuka.<sup>19</sup> Thus, if this was the case, the feelings of both communities had been deeply hurt by each other.

If music before mosques was supposed to be played for the first time in Ahmedabad, it was not the first time this issue aroused controversy in Gujarat. As stated on the previous chapter, on the 12 January 1932, the *Times of India* announced that Maharaja Gaekwar Sayajirao from Baroda had passed a law authorizing the playing of music in Hindu religious procession in Baroda city.<sup>20</sup> Regardless of Islamic sector protests the law was approved but not without several reactions from the Muslims of this city. A Muslim committee was organised in that year to 'bring to the notice of [the] Government the great excitement and alarm prevailing among the Muslims of Bombay and other parts of India owing to the recent announcement of the decision of the Executive Council of Baroda'.<sup>21</sup> The issue of music in Hindu procession had an apparent historicity and in 1932 the animosity aroused on this ground was so huge that it was necessary to reinforce the police presence in some celebrations following the approval of this law. In a letter dated the 8<sup>th</sup> of February, General N.G. Shinde of Baroda was asked to deploy more troops and military groups with their

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<sup>18</sup> 'Reply to the Memorial submitted by the Ahmedabad District Muslim League' Poona, 24<sup>th</sup> October 1940, Communal tension and incidents in Bombay Province (Gujarat region), HDSB, 844, Pt.II. MSA (B).

<sup>19</sup> Para. IV-5 of the Memorial. Dhandhuka and Padana Incident. Hindu-Muslim tension, Dhandhuka in Ahmedabad District, HDSB, 844-E, 1940, p. 241. MSA (B).

<sup>20</sup> Playing of music before mosques in Baroda (Government orders explained). Music before mosques 1932. HPOPD, list 4, general daftar 843, file 68, p. 18-19. BRO (VG).

<sup>21</sup> Letter from Suleman Cassum Haji, President of Muslim Committee, to the Manager, dated the 26<sup>th</sup> of January 1932. Music before mosques 1932, HPOPD, general daftar 38, file 68, p. 34. BRO (VG).

respective weapons in order to preserve law and order likely to be disturbed because of the heated protests by Muslim sectors.<sup>22</sup>

Among other things, the controversy over music in processions in 1939 was produced by the ambiguity in stipulating that only soft music should be played, as had been the case for the Daudi Bohra mosque, the question whether this would be applicable for the other mosques that were in the route the processionists were taking. Muslim leaders had accepted in 1937 that only soft music could be played in front of the mosque but no music at all at prayer times, and an order was passed accordingly. In 1938 the district magistrate had passed an order stating these same points. However in 1939 when there was conflict again over this issue, it was not clear what would be done by the processionists passing by the other two mosques –the Jamma Masjid and the Kureishi mosque– since as done in 1938, a law was approved in relation to prohibit playing music specifically for the Daudi Bohra mosque, except for soft music. In this sense, another point of interest in the 1939 dispute was about what the traditional route of the Hindu procession was supposed to be. Muslim sectors argued that Hindus had deliberately changed the route to hurt Muslim feelings. But the inconformity was evident in both communities as Hindus, on their part, claimed that only Muslims had been heard by the authorities and thus music had been banned, whereas Hindus were said to be deprived from the right to be listened to by the administrators.

Then, because of Muslim complaints, the commission of inquiry for the 1939 disturbance also focused on elucidating the traditional route for the Hindu procession as a key aspect to understand this episode but mainly to find out about any kind of provocations by agitators in order to change the route deliberately to cause trouble. This was a common

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<sup>22</sup> Urgent/secret letter to General N.G. Shinde, dated the 8<sup>th</sup> of February 1932. Music before mosques 1932, HPOPD, general daftar 38, file 68, p. 60. BRO (VG).



situation for some riots, as seen in the riot of 1928 in Godhra studied in chapter three, one of the main agitators from the Hindu Mahasabha. Vamanrao Mukadam had not only made provocations while leading a Hindu procession by shooting a gun intimidating people, he had also attempted at changing the route to arouse people's animosities and challenge the Muslim community.

Thus the commission was also to elucidate if the route taken that year by the processionists was, in fact, traditional or not. In this sense, appealing to tradition and custom was not a novelty in this kind of controversy. In 1927, following a disturbance during the Shivaji Tercentenary Celebrations held in Baroda, the district magistrate undertook investigations to clarify if playing music before mosques was customary, that is to say, if antiquity and tradition, indeed, sanctioned the current religious performances of the communities and if so, in what way.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, the route of the Hindu procession was to be analysed in order to appraise how valid it was and to what extent it had been changed to create instability by members of a particular community.

However, there were no certainties about what was traditional. It was difficult to settle an agreement on these terms, since categorizing something as customary or not had to do with different criteria: time, Brahmins' approval or sanction in the scriptures, among others, which made it difficult to come to terms with this issue. Nevertheless, conclusions were reached grounded on the evidence administrators had available at that time but in doing so, there was always divergence on one of the parts when the verdicts did not match their conceptions of tradition, since each sector had different notions of tradition and the

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<sup>23</sup> The conclusion was that whenever there were Mahomedan musicians playing the music, they voluntarily stopped music when passing by a mosque and in case no Hindu organizer asked them to keep playing. Thus, apparently, the absence of music before mosques was not a compulsory aspect that regulated the Hindu processions. See Music before mosques 1932. HPOPD, general daftar 843, file 68, p.19. BRO (VG).

traditional, therefore, this discrepancy made it possible to invalidate rhetorically the other's practices related to certain rituals. While defending positions, both Muslims and Hindus learned to appeal to the idea of the customary as a foundation of their identities and culture. They started speaking the language of colonial administrators that saw in tradition and the traditional the sanction to perform and regulate certain rituals and activities which should be shaped according to what was supposed to be a long-established convention.

On the other hand, the communities' versions provide more information about the controversy, even though the intention in sending several letters to authorities to explain, complain and, at the end, settle the situation between the communities, was clearly blaming the other community for the occurrences. According to Hindu narratives the events of Dhandhuka were not religious in their entirety. There is, by contrast, the identification of a political aspect in the disturbances. The relation of events for the Hindu version is narrated in a booklet entitled *Gujarat Prantik Hindu Sabha Tarafti Nimayeli Dhandhuka Prakarni Tapas Samitino Report* (Report of the enquiry committee appointed by the Gujarati Provincial Hindu Sabha) published by Govindlal Chhaganlal Desai the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January 1940.

As has been stated above, the settlement of inquiry commissions was and is yet fundamental in the aftermath of violence, since its interpretation is a process as important as the production of violence itself. The explanation of a riot stands for the justification of people's or participants' actions and it also implies the judgement or the appraisal of a community in terms either of victim or perpetrator which in a material dimension it could mean the support to a community from the part of the government and the exoneration from economic penalties imposed on the responsible sector. Given this importance, it was common for the communities to set up their own commissions of inquiry apart from the official one settled by the pertinent authorities. That is why the version of each community for the different episodes of confrontation attempted at absolving the whole community from

the responsibility. In 1941, for instance, the riot brought a huge economic and material loss. In this context, the petition from the Hindu side was that the Muslims being supposedly responsible for starting and, indeed, producing the riot, should pay for these losses.

Thus as a whole the Hindu booklet narration corresponds with the official version of the events in Dhandhuka. It mentions the fact about the women trying to seize the idol when the procession was passing by the Kureishi mosque and about the slaughtering of the cow in retaliation by a group of Muslims two days after the procession incident. However, there are a couple of additional episodes that, in fact, add more pathos to the narration. On the one hand, there is another episode in which some Muslim women would have beaten a Brahmin woman and also an emphasis suggesting that the cow was slaughtered after being cruelly tortured and that the following day there was a Muslim procession taking water mixed with the blood of the sacrificed animal in order to wound the religious feelings of the Hindus.<sup>24</sup> By contrast, the official report made no mention of these episodes and rather in a separate document it denied both the assault on the Brahmin woman and the procession taking the blood of the cow. The fact of adding these additional dramatic episodes to the account does not necessarily mean that there was a deliberate attempt at lying. However, it must be underlined that in a time of social turbulence, even the slightest rumour could be taken as seriously and may have had a huge impact on the social conditions. Thus the Hindu narration may have been articulated by incorporating these dubious facts without corroborating them adequately.

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<sup>24</sup> Translation of noteworthy passages occurring in the booklet entitled 'Gujarat Prantik Hindu Sabha Tarafti Nimayeli Dhandhuka Prakarni Tapas Samitino Report' sent with a memorandum on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March, 1940. Hindu-Muslim tension, Dhandhuka in Ahmedabad District, HDSB, 844-E, 1940, p. 181-183. MSA (B).

In addition, beyond pointing out the religious dimension of the event, the Hindu report was clear and emphatic in stating that political parties were to some extent the promoters of hostilities due to their political competition. Thus the document expressed that

In our opinion, the root cause of this trouble is not religious, but political. The obstacles put in the way of this religious procession of Dhandhuka were the indirect result of the political rivalry and bitterness which has been prevalent from some years past in this unfortunate country of ours between the Hindus and the Muslims, or more truly, between the Congress and the Muslim League, and the bitter feelings that exist between the two communities.<sup>25</sup>

In this sense, the report started with the judgement that the riot was not a spontaneous outburst but a political machination product of the party competition between the Congress and the Muslim League. However even if there was a perception of political issues encouraging the riot, there was also the idea of the Muslim community as extremists and fanatics. Thus the Hindu report clearly expressed that: ‘Mischievous Muslims, it seems, had decided beforehand to oppose the ancient right of the Hindus to celebrate their religious festival. A belief is prevalent among them that the religious feelings of the Muslims must always be respected while the Muslims are not bound to respect the religious feelings of the Hindus.’<sup>26</sup>

There was again the claim that Hindu rituals were sanctioned by tradition. But in this elaboration it is interesting to note that one of the main elements shaping tradition was time, immemorial time moulding the rituals that survived through ages to be repeatedly performed in contemporary periods. This was part of the assimilation of the colonial discourse whose basic criterion for considering something as traditional was antiquity, a long term existence of practices and beliefs. Thus Hindus appealed to an ‘ancient right’ to perform their celebrations in the ‘customary’ fashion which in this case meant performing music in the processions

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 179.

while taking the idols along different streets even if there were some mosques in the route. The point here was timelessness, a feature rather claimed for Hinduism more than Islam.

On the other hand, a common elaboration in the arguments by Hindu sectors was the supposed disrespectful attitude of Muslims who demanded respect for their beliefs and rituals without reciprocating that respect for non-Muslims and their practices. In this light Muslims were portrayed as intolerant since some of their very celebrations, in fact, were accompanied by music like the case of Muharram, in which a *tazia* (representations of tombs of Islam martyrs) procession was performed with drums and music being played. Thus, in this perspective, Muslims were able to tolerate their own noise or music but not the one made by a different community. In addition, the *tazia* procession, a Shia ceremony, was also rejected by the orthodox Sunnis. They stated: ‘What a pity it is that even at this enlightened age of knowledge and art people adjusting some chips of wood & bamboos and some sheets of paper in such a way as to superficially represent a tomb, dishonor and degrade the true religion, taking Tazia as an intermedia [*sic*] of super-natural powers in the realization of their supplications.’<sup>27</sup>

In this way the ultimate goal in Hindu narratives was declaring their community as non-guilty and passing the blame on to Muslims for the riot. All this in a political context that increasingly identified Muslims as separatists demanding the creation of Pakistan, which in the language of the period was translated as the ‘vivisection of India’. As shown in newspaper reports related to the riot of 1941, it was being reported that “‘the recent riot is the consequence of international situation. [But] none of the Pakistan scheme is responsible for

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<sup>27</sup> These were repetitive criticisms to Muslim community, but not only from the part of Hindu sectors, indeed some Muslims disagreed with some ‘non-orthodox’ practices such as music in processions played by Muslims and *tazia* procession. Booklet *Bid-at-e-TAZIA. Heresy of the Tazia Worship*. Shaikh Mohamed Jehangeermia, Chief of Mangrol (Kathiawar). October 20, 1930, p. 4. Music before mosques 1932. HPOPD, general daftar 843, file 68. BRO (VG).

this.” This is clearly inciting the Hindus against Muslims by falsely connecting the political goal of the Muslims with this riot. It is also tantamount to saying that the Muslims desire to bring about anarchy in India in present time of difficulties.’<sup>28</sup> Then the demand of Pakistan by some Muslim sectors was taken as a metonymical motivation behind several conflicts occurring with this community. Increasingly they started to be seen as secessionist and causing trouble exclusively for the sake of Pakistan. This period, from the early 40’s is particularly identified by this kind of rhetoric, as seen in chapter 6. The campaigning of far Hindu right figures like K.M. Munshi had been exhaustive in denouncing and countering the supposed Muslim secessionism. His *Akhand Hindustan* campaign undertaken in 1942 but articulated with these argumentative formations in previous years shows that these ideological constructions of Muslims as anti-nationalist were in the air pervading the collective consciousness. Munshi contributed exhaustively in circulating this kind of discursive constructions by branding Muslim community as master-racist because of their supposed pretention of reconquering India and ‘disruptionists’ for their seditious attitude in the creation of Pakistan.

On its part, the Muslim account of this episode is, in general, more historical. In this sense, it provides a longer-term scenario of the origins of the dispute, locating the point of departure in 1937, just as in the case of the official report. It is important to note, that this narration is less detailed in explaining the particular episode of 1939, and it rather focuses on providing the history of the deterioration of Hindu-Muslim relations on the ground of the issue of playing music before mosques. As it happened in the Hindu account in relation to the cow slaughter, the Muslim chronicle also appealed to a foundational fact which was the

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<sup>28</sup> Letter to the district magistrate of Ahmedabad dated the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May 1941, signed by M.M. Nasih, the Honorary Secretary of the Muslim Relief Committee. Hindu-Muslim riots, Bombay and Ahmedabad, 1941. Miscellaneous papers, petitions, etc. regarding (1) allegations against the Police and (2) appointment of a Committee to inquire into the various aspects of the Riots. HDSB, 844-H-VII, 1941, p. 203. MSA (B).

playing of music before mosques as not having precedent in the Dhandhuka district until 1937. Muslims were clear in referring that playing music when passing in front of the mosques was ‘absolutely a new custom’.<sup>29</sup> The year of 1937 had supposedly marked the change when Hindus for the first time attempted at playing music, but some responsible Hindu leaders of this community persuaded other members to give up this intention. However in 1938 some political agitators, identified with the Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha, attempted again at being granted a license by the district magistrate to play music.<sup>30</sup> This time they succeeded in getting this authorization but at the same time, the description continues, they took advantage of this and changed the route of the procession in order to pass by two other mosques.<sup>31</sup> In this occasion, Muslims were unprepared and outnumbered by Hindus thus they had to accept this fact. On the other hand, it was said that when the investigations were carried out, leaders of both communities had apparently agreed that music had never been performed in front of mosques. That is to say, that it was not a tradition. As for other Hindu leaders they had expressed that, at least, no big instruments had been played near mosques’ premises.<sup>32</sup> Then whether it was colonial administrators, Hindu sectors or Muslim groups, there was the conviction that tradition or custom should be the foundation for performing the different practices and rituals. Thus, either music before mosques or the particular routes of a Hindu procession, the attempt was to validate them through the notion of tradition.

Then when in 1939 some Hindu individuals requested, again, authorization for music to be performed, this time Muslims were better organized and unwilling to allow this to

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<sup>29</sup> Letter to the district magistrate dated 20<sup>th</sup> July 1940 Hindu-Muslim tension, Dhandhuka in Ahmedabad District, HDSB, 844-E, 1940, p. 211. MSA (B).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 211.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 213.

happen once again arguing that this was not customary. They took a more belligerent stance and assaulted the Hindu procession when passing by its supposed new route. Thus without making any reference to the attempt of Muslim women at seizing the Hindu idols, the Muslim narration, as mentioned above, was rather emphatic in conveying the historicity of the differences between both communities. This year, two days before the Ekadashi procession was carried out, the district magistrate passed an order banning music in front of mosques and also an order not to carry arms the day of the procession. Then according to the Muslim version the music performed before the mosques contravened the order passed by the magistrate. Thus the conclusion of the Muslim complaint was that the performance of music by the Hindus had been illegal as well as purposely disrespectful of Muslim feelings.

Following the Muslim interpretation, there is no doubt that it articulated an antithetical version to the Hindu description. From this perspective, the main argument of this discourse was the novelty of performing music before mosques, contrary to what Hindu opinion expressed in terms that this had been an immemorial custom for this community. But as mentioned, it was difficult to come to terms with a notion that had been recently created in the colonial period by the British administrators who by trying, to some extent, to follow a policy of no intervention in cultural affairs attached themselves to texts and elite group versions of practices and rituals that not necessarily were customary in an extended way. Culture and tradition were always negotiable spheres and it was tough to reach a consensus mainly when the issues under discussion had inter-community lines affecting a different community.

On the other hand, it must be underlined that the idea of tradition was not only related to the actual cultural practices of the communities but also to the concrete coexistence of both communities. Thus, both accounts stated that there had also existed an immemorial tradition of harmony that was only disturbed in 1937 with a supposed tradition that was not preserved:



in Hindu perspective playing music and in Muslim opinion, just the opposite, not allowance of music when passing by in front of mosques.

In this context, some moderate sectors suggested that ‘the majority of the Hindu and Muslim public have no feeling of animosity against one another. On the contrary, they want to come nearer one-another at the present calamitous time.’<sup>33</sup> And this had been a prevailing feeling for several years in an atmosphere of social dislocation process; for instance, when the riot of 1928 broke out in Godhra, there were also Hindu actors emphasizing what were said to be friendly relationship of Hindu and Muslim communities and the disgraceful campaign of dogmatic politicians like Vamanrao Mukadam promoting division and enmity. The view was, in fact, that opinionated figures such as him were the real target of aversion by Muslim community, for as in general, Hindus and Muslims had had a tradition of peaceful coexistence.

Focusing on the different perspectives of the event it is clear that there are several points of coincidence in these rather contrasting visions: one, the idea of tradition as sanctioning communities’ practices; second, a perception of friendly relations between communities in the past; third, the idea that authorities were dysfunctional in solving the conflicts (for the Hindu sector British officials were incapable of preventing the cow slaughter whereas for the Muslim community, the authorities were not efficient at regulating the no performance of music before mosques) and fourth, a visible political hand of some organisations in articulating episodes of violence to take the benefits from it. Even if the final verdict of the official report was to blame the Muslim community, the final conclusion is the interventionism of political bodies in detonating disturbances together with the idea that oriental societies like the one in the Indian subcontinent were susceptible to display

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<sup>33</sup> Note in *Hindustan & Prajamitra*, dated 25<sup>th</sup> May 1941 (Bombay). Hindu-Muslim riots, Bombay and Ahmedabad, 1941. HDSB, 844-H-VIII, p. 49. MSA (B).

exacerbated religious animosities by the persistent manipulation of their leaders during religious performances.

But as for the participants and the immediate conflict, the official report concluded, accomplishing its task of pointing out offenders, that the Muslim community was the one to be blamed for the events of 1939, because it was members of this community who were the main transgressors by assaulting the idols being carried in the procession. Even though Hindus played music nearby some mosques, this was rather played down because, among other things, there had been some ambiguity when regulating the issue of music before the shrines the procession passed by. It was not clearly indicated if music was banned from the three mosques in the route of the procession, or at least, it had been indicated 'not to prevent the Hindus from exercising the right of passing along public roads with music, provided no music was played, or loud noise made, immediately near a mosque during recognised prayer times'.<sup>34</sup> Then, the circular number S.D. 2508 dated the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August 1939 was vague or interpretable enough to provide the possibility of playing music when passing by mosques given there was no 'recognised prayer times'. In this perspective, Muslims would have altered order and public peace, Hindus, conversely, would have acted accordingly to the district magistrate's orders.

In this scenario, the findings of the official commission of inquiry concluded that:

2. It is true that, since the date of the procession, there has been Hindu Muslim tension at Dhandhuka but the provocative behaviour of the Muslims seems to be primarily responsible for its creation, since some of them went out of their way to attack the procession, and to attempt the slaughter of a cow on the same day. Their action in slaughtering a cow a few days later in the Jumma Masjid and distributing the meat to the poor further embittered inter-communal relations. Even if it be true that the Hindus are now boycotting the Muslims, the restoration of friendly relations lies entirely in the hands of the leaders of the two communities, and there is little that Government can do beyond protecting either community

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<sup>34</sup> Para. IV-5 of the Memorial. Dhandhuka and Padana Incident. Hindu-Muslim tension, Dhandhuka in Ahmedabad District, HDSB, 844-E, 1940, p. 240. MSA (B).

in the exercise of its lawful rights. No action is, therefore, necessary on the part of the Government.

3. Another matter referred to in the resolutions is the alleged failure of the Dhandhuka Municipality to elect Muslims to any of its Committees, unless Muslims were illegally excluded the Collector cannot interfere. In any case, this is a matter for the General Department to deal with, and the papers may be referred v. o. to that Department for such action as may be considered necessary.<sup>35</sup>

Thus if Muslim at first sight were the responsible for the disturbance, broader social and political developments also had their part to play. According to the Collector of Ahmedabad District:

Actually Hindu Mahomedan relations in Ahmedabad have been deteriorating from at least 1938, when the Hindus in the Municipality aided by Congress made an unjustifiable attempt, which aroused a storm at the time, to get a Mahomedan graveyard closed in the Ellis Bridge Area. On a long view it may be held that if the Mahomedans started the riot, the Hindus were to a large extent responsible for the deterioration in relations between the Communities which rendered a Riot possible. On this ground payment of compensation at the same rate by both Communities would be justified. Any other method of payment of compensation would accentuate communal differences.<sup>36</sup>

In the battle for interpreting the riot in 1941, the Hindu sector required a special committee to be set up to investigate the origins of the riot in a way that inculpated the Muslims. By so doing, they hoped to be discharged from paying the totality of the damages and paying only a minimal part in comparison with Muslims. Thus the Hindu programme at the creation of this committee of truth was: '(1) Appointment of an Enquiry Committee, (2) Fixation of the guilt on Mahomedans (3) Liability of Hindus to pay only for damage to Mahomedan property, [these were] the three stages in the programme of the Hindus.'<sup>37</sup> But a verdict with these

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<sup>35</sup> Memorandum of the Oriental translator's office dated the 15<sup>th</sup> December 1939. Hindu-Muslim tension at Dhandhuka in Ahmedabad District. HDSB, 844-E, 1940. MSA (B).

<sup>36</sup> Confidential letter of the office of the District Magistrate dated the 5<sup>th</sup> May 1941, Hindu-Muslim Riots, Bombay and Ahmedabad, 1941. Miscellaneous papers, petitions, etc. regarding (1) allegations against the Police and (2) appointment of a Committee to inquire into the various aspects of the Riots. HDSB, 844-H-VII. 1941, p. 65. MSA (B).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

characteristics, it was said by the colonial administrator, was ‘blind to the 4<sup>th</sup> stage what [*sic*] would follow, renewed communal rioting.’<sup>38</sup>

The growing animosity was seen in other parts of Gujarat also. For example, Baroda witnessed a controversy that aroused acrimony among Muslims in Gujarat, which originated in the resolution of the Baroda government to demolish a mosque in Lahripura in June 1934 which hurt the religious feelings of the Muslims in Baroda city<sup>39</sup> and brought ‘a great effect on the minds of the audience [who] consequently agreed to share with the Muslim world to defend the Mosque.’<sup>40</sup> Because of this resolution Muslims of Calcutta, Cochin and Rangoon organized a rally to protest against the demolition of the mosque. Added here as Paul Brass has argued in the case of contemporary disturbances, there are ‘signifiers of violence’ in the production of inter-community riots, one of these are and were the mosques which stand for ‘the violence done by Muslims to the Hindu body’ since some of these shrines were supposed to be ‘built upon the ruins of Hindu temples destroyed by Muslim conquerors.’<sup>41</sup> This rationality was effective at different historical moments and led to the reconstruction of the Somnath temple in south Gujarat in 1950 or to the destruction of the Babri Masjid in December 1992, both campaigns orchestrated by recalcitrant Hindu nationalist leaders, K.M. Munshi for the first case, and L.K. Advani, leader of the BJP for Babar’s mosque.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>39</sup> Copy of telegram dated the 12<sup>th</sup> of June 1934 from Hajiadam Husen Kasam, president of Jamiyate Nizamulislam Bantva to the Resident, Baroda. Miscellaneous correspondence regarding the Khajoori mosque situated in Lahripura. HPORD, file 245/26, p. 8. BRO (VG).

<sup>40</sup> Muslim Spiritual Declaration, copy forwarded to the minister of the Baroda State for information, dated the 12<sup>th</sup> of June 1934, Ibid. Miscellaneous correspondence regarding the Khajoori mosque situated in Lahripura. HPORD, file 245/26, p. 9. BRO (VG).

<sup>41</sup> Paul Brass, *The production of Hindu-Muslim violence*, p. 36.

## Agitational strategies: Arya Samajis and Mahasabhaites

It is clear that at a collective level the Muslim sector was blamed for the dispute.

Nevertheless, there was also the identification of concrete individuals, members of Hindu organisations, causing trouble in some places in Gujarat such as Ahmedabad, Godhra, Baroda, Surat, and others. The Hindu account visibly omitted any reference to this, but the official and Muslim versions clarified the participation of figures like Bava Haridas, a Hindu sadhu, who in 1938 had persisted in sending an application to the district magistrate seeking approval for playing music before mosques and Gangaram Khanna, secretary of the Arya Samaj in 1939, and secretary of the Gujarat Provincial Hindu Sabha in 1940 during the time of the riots.

The official account, for instance, pointed out the way Hindu Mahasabha campaigners manoeuvred to profit politically from these episodes. Then it was said that ‘Hindu Maha Sabha workers took advantage of the situation to organise a huge procession at Dhandhuka and to start a branch of the Hindu Maha Sabha there on the 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1939. Since then the Hindu-Muslim tension has continued to exist, but no untoward incident has been reported.’<sup>42</sup> As seen in chapter three the Hindu Mahasabha operated politically at least, in two dimensions: ‘in its first aspect it aspired to be a rival political platform to the Congress, for running elections. It has always been the watch dog of Hindu interests as against the Hindu Muslim synthesis which the Congress represents. At all times it has been the defensive arm of the community against Muslim aggression. But there is another and more permanent aspect for which the Hindu Mahasabha stands and will stand in the future. It represents an

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<sup>42</sup> Para. IV-5 of the Memorial. Dhandhuka and Padana Incident. Hindu-Muslim tension, Dhandhuka in Ahmedabad District, HDSB, 844-E, 1940, p. 240. MSA (B).

unapologetic expression of the Hindu's right to exist as a Hindu.'<sup>43</sup> Munshi's parallel statement that 'I refuse to be apologetic of my race, religion or culture'<sup>44</sup> mirrors the Sabha's rationale. Congruous with this political ideology, the message socialized by this organization provoked an open antagonism between communities, while calling Hindus not to be 'apologetic' for their cultural identity and to oppose Muslims.

The presence of members of these organisations was no curious coincidence. On the contrary, it was a calculated strategy aimed at spreading the organisation's ideology and gaining more supporters in political competition. This was also the case for the riot of 1928 at Godhra where Vamanrao Mukadam not only benefited from the event but also promoted the confrontation there to increase the influence of the Mahasabha and its anti-Muslim sentiment. The Dhandhuka episode confirms this *modus operandi*. In a report to the government it was said that:

MR. KHANNA EXORTED THE HINDUS TO COMBINE AND BECOME MEMBERS OF THE HINDU MAHASABHA AND ALSO REFERRED TO THE SUCCESS ACHIEVED BY THE MAHASABHAITS OF HYDERABAD (DECCAN) BY UNITY OF THE HINDUS.<sup>45</sup>

The sources do not provide much information on Gangaram Khanna, although it is said that he was from Ahmedabad. In 1939 he came to Dhandhuka in order to campaign on behalf of the Arya Samaj, an organization that, as seen in chapter two, included in its political agenda the cow protection as well as *shuddhi*, that is, the ritual of reconversion for Christians and Muslims that wanted to come back to the Hindu fold. In Dhandhuka he held a meeting at

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<sup>43</sup> Working Committee Resolution of the 31<sup>st</sup> August 1942 and further developments. All India Hindu Mahasabha and Provincial organizations. HDSB, no 355(73)D, p.73. MSA (B).

<sup>44</sup> Munshi, *Akhand Hindustan*. p. 43.

<sup>45</sup> Emphasis in the original. Report to the Secretary to Government on playing of music near mosque in Dhandhuka on 24-9-1939. Hindu Muslim tension at Dhandhuka in Ahmedabad District. HDSB, file 844-E, 1940. MSA (B).

Vallav Vadi attended by local Hindus and Garasias from the outside.<sup>46</sup> The way events had developed and resulted into cow slaughter provided the perfect justification for Gangaram Khanna to come to Dhandhuka where he had been the previous year (1938) for the same Ekadashi procession. In the meeting held at the end of September 1939, he called on Hindus to express resentment at cow sacrifice by Muslims; to show their disapproval at the assault of the Palkhi by the two Muslim women and to appoint a committee to organize and implement some political measures.<sup>47</sup>

For the riot of 1941, Gangaram Khanna made sure to be present in the geography of the conflict. In a meeting held at Sitarambua's Vada, Raopura in Baroda, the 12<sup>th</sup> of December 1941

Mr. Khanna said that he was doing his duty as a Hindu and nothing more. It was... the duty of every Hindu to protect Hindus and Hinduism. Thousands of Hindu women were converted to Islam for increasing their population and the Hindus should therefore save their mothers and sisters from falling into the hands of the Muslims. He further added that the Hindus should study Gita and follow the principle of karma as enunciated by lord Krishna in it... He appealed to all Hindus to unite against the Pakistan scheme of the Muslims and that could be done by keeping before their mind the ideals of the Hindu Mahasabha.<sup>48</sup>

Controversial statements and accusations were part of his rhetoric perpetuating a pejorative stereotype of Muslims as kidnappers of Hindu girls and fundamentalists forcing conversion of Hindu people. But these arguments were not particularly his; they were rather concomitant with the Arya Samaj notions of Islam. As seen in chapter two, this organisation even performed theatrical representations of Muslims abducting Hindu girls. In addition, these kinds of figures also had a well-known reputation, in his case Gangaram Khanna echoed the image of a pugnacious fellow, that is, the way Vamanrao Mukadam was described in official reports. Some publications of the period complained about his campaigns, The Daily Rozgar,

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid

<sup>48</sup> Confidential fortnightly report for the period ending 27<sup>th</sup> December 1941. Fortnightly confidential reports form 12<sup>th</sup> August 1941 to 30<sup>th</sup> July 1942. Huzur Political Office, CD, daftar 7, file 147. p. 25/105. BRO (VG).

for instance, reported the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December 1939 in Ahmedabad that ‘Mr. Gangaran Khanna is ‘responsible’ for continual tension: ‘Why should authorities allow such people to go anywhere they like and vitiate the atmosphere? Such people are responsible for a breach of public peace... Mr. Khanna’s presence is dangerous to public peace in Dhandhuka. The authorities should, therefore, ask him to quit Dhandhuka.’<sup>49</sup> Notwithstanding the complaints, it seems that this was the required profile these organizations demanded from the activists. But the main aspect to be emphasized is that in spite of the tension and the increasing communal antagonism, some Hindu and Muslim sectors still believed and clearly declared that the problems were particular individuals causing trouble between the communities and that there had been a tradition of cordial relationships in the recent past.

Then the dynamics followed by these extremist organizations included sending their contentious campaigners to the places where conflicts broke out in order to take advantage of the turbulent social conditions and to create more antagonism with the aim of gaining people’s support for their political platforms. In this sense, regardless of the social turbulence prevailing in the aftermath of Dhandhuka disturbance, the Hindus of the place on the 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1939 ‘took out a religious procession on account of Dasserah in which about 4,000 persons participated. The important feature of this annual procession was that many Girasias from the surrounding villages and about 200 student volunteer in khaki uniform took part in it. On the same day an office of the Hindu Mahasabha was opened in Dhandhuka and a meeting of 3,000 persons was held.’<sup>50</sup> Undoubtedly, the Hindu Mahasabha operated taking the benefits from such public meetings and it was not sensitive about social conditions and the potential for riots to break out. On the contrary, the organisation did not despise any kind

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<sup>49</sup> Extract from the weekly confidential report of the District Magistrate Ahmedabad, dated the 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1939. Hindu Muslim tension at Dhandhuka in Ahmedabad District. HDSB, file 844-E, 1940. MSA (B).

<sup>50</sup> Extract from the weekly confidential report of the District Magistrate Ahmedabad, dated the 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1939. Hindu Muslim tension at Dhandhuka in Ahmedabad District, HDSB, file 844-E, 1940. MSA (B).



of resource at hand and the inclusion of groups, such as the Girasias, in its campaigning revealed its willingness to take on Muslims of all sorts.

Thus the actions and rhetoric of these organizations was intended to preserve hostilities for the sake of more influence in the political sphere. And in fact, they succeeded in preserving confrontation, because in the competition for mobilizing communities, Muslim sectors undertook a counteroffensive. For example, some Muslims opened *akhadas* or gymnasiums, just like the Hindus and in these places boys were instructed in physical culture and drill.<sup>51</sup> In 1939 there was, in addition, the creation of the Muslim National Guards

to rouse the Muslims to action and to join the Muslim League to keep the Muslims of India in touch with the affairs of other Muslim countries and to deal with schemes for the social and economic uplift of the Muslim community, the organization shall maintain a weekly newspaper in English or Urdu or both... A guardsman shall be a member of the Muslim League and of no other political organization... Its aim will be to mould and coordinate the mussalman community of India and build a nation out of it. At present day they are not a nation...<sup>52</sup>

In the guise of defending their community, these Muslims caused further alienation and deepened the climate of confrontation.

On the other hand, this belligerent rhetoric did not merely circulate at a discursive level; it led to some very real violence. For example, Muslims of Godhra assaulted and badly injured Vamanrao Mukadam and a fellow campaigner, with the latter dying after some days while Mukadam recovered. As for Gangaram Khanna he was also assaulted in 1938, he 'was stabbed in cold blood by one Bismillah Hamid Khan, a Muslim League volunteer, who confessed that he committed this offence, being incensed at the intemperate speeches made during the Hindu Maha Sabha Congress held during December last. He selected Khanna as

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Volunteer Organisations. Muslim National Guards, July 1939. HDSB, file 1017-E. MSA (B).

his victim as he was the Secretary of the Congress and was also connected with a kidnapping case in which some friend of Bismillah Khan had been convicted.<sup>53</sup>

Thus two important aspects come from this: one, extremist figures not only took action under the auspices of radical Hindu organisations. They were also linked to supposedly moderate organisations such as the Congress. Gangaram Khanna is an illustration of this together with other important figures like K.M. Munshi and Malaviya who even if having Congress affiliation had also a more belligerent ideology and links or a close relationship with the Mahasabha or an ideological consensus with the RSS. In his case, Khanna was unambiguous in his declaration that 'India's freedom could be obtained by militarisation and industrialisation of the Hindus and not by Ahimsa. The goals of both the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha were identical viz the freedom of India but their ways differed in ideals.'<sup>54</sup>

And the second aspect, intemperate speeches of these figures did have impact on both communities and provoked real confrontation whether for aggressive or defensive purposes. The authorities' awareness of this problem was apparent in their attempt at regulating the delivery of public speeches by conflictive figures from these organizations, for instance, B. S. Moonje, president of the Hindu Mahasabha, was banned from giving any public speech at Surat on the ground that he would create huge trouble given the sensitive social conditions prevailing in 1929 after a riot during the Ganapati procession.

At this point, it is pertinent to explore one of the controversial speeches in the aftermath of the Dhandhuka riot delivered by a Hindu activist from the Hindu Mission in

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<sup>53</sup> Secret extract from Bombay Province Weekly Letter No. 30, dated the 30<sup>th</sup> July 1938. Communal tension and incidents in Bombay Province (Gujarat region). HDSB, 844, part II. p. 75. MSA (B).

<sup>54</sup> Confidential fortnightly report for the period ending 27<sup>th</sup> December 1941. Fortnightly confidential reports form 12<sup>th</sup> August 1941 to 30<sup>th</sup> July 1942. Huzur Political Office, CD, daftar 7, file 147. p. 25/105. BRO (VG).

1940 intended to embed deeper animadversion against the Muslim sector in Dhandhuka.

Then Shri Madhvendraji Shastri told in a meeting that year that

The Hindus of Dhandhuka in Gujarat will win real honour as the servants of mother cow and the tales of their heroism will be written in history in letters of gold... If prayers are disturbed by the ringing of a bell, why are their prayers not disturbed by the blowing of motor horns in cities? Tell this to the Musalmans. Why do those who get frightened by our music, beat large drums vociferously on the occasion of *tazias*? I think that this is only a game for harassing the Hindus by putting forward the plea of music. Hence I tell you that your fight is just. Do not allow it to be relaxed in the slightest degree. To die for the sake of religion is destined for the heroes alone. I think Dhandhuka may become the battlefield for the Hindus of the whole of India as Bardoli became for the Congress... Can the Hindus tolerate the rule of the Mussalmans over the country for whose glory and culture our ancestors, Maharana Pratap, the brave Shivaji and various Hindu heroes have shed their blood?

It is the game of the Muslims to harass the Hindus. This reparation on their part is so great that Allana [*sic*] Mashriki intends to collect four lakhs of khaksars in Delhi at the time of Diwali... is it proper that we should remain negligent? If the Musalmans will not take a warning from this movement of yours, the Musalmans will be reduced in India to a plight to which Jews in Germany have been reduced...<sup>55</sup>

An imagery of sacrifice unto death is evident and given the social conditions of this disturbance its effect into action could hardly be doubted. Far from pacifying the animosities several of these activists made sure as not to let the fight 'to be relaxed in the slightest degree'. The call was clear in asking the Hindus to die for religion.

Thus the conflictivity of these years was not rooted primarily in religious passions or immemorial animosities that were liable to get out of control at a minimal provocation. It was rather part of a calculated strategy to strengthen the political platform of parties and organisations of different affiliations, Hindu or Muslim, in a contest for political power. In this political struggle, the exacerbation of religious animosity had its place but not as an intrinsic attribute of the communities but as an organisational strategy useful in mobilizing one community against the other.

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<sup>55</sup> Speech published in *Hindu*, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1940, Ahmedabad. Hindu-Muslim tension, Dhandhuka in Ahmedabad District, HDSB, 844-E, 1940, p. 147-149. MSA (B).

The next chapter will examine Vallabhbhai Patel's attitude to these developments. As the 'Sardar' who ruled the Congress in Gujarat with an iron hand, his role was of great importance in determining whether or not such mindsets would enter the political mainstream in the region.

## Chapter five

### Vallabhbhai Patel's nationalist notions and campaigning in Gujarat

Much has been said about a supposed neglect in acknowledging Vallabhbhai Patel's contribution to the Indian national struggle and the consolidation of India particularly when contrasted with figures such as Gandhi or Jawaharlal Nehru<sup>1</sup>. Perhaps this sense of injustice when appreciating the Sardar has to do with his conscious decision of remaining second during his whole life, at first to Vithalbai, his elder brother, and then to Gandhi and Nehru<sup>2</sup>. He was without doubt one of the major figures within the Indian nationalist movement in its final three decades, and he has been the subject of a number of laudatory biographies.<sup>3</sup> Here, however, we shall adopt a more critical perspective in examining his attitude on the communal question. Opinions on this topic are highly polarised, for while some scholars have tended to see him as a declared opponent of Muslims, others have highlighted his supposed promotion of unity between Hindus and Muslims.<sup>4</sup> In this, they are able to provide evidence to back up their assertions taken from various stages of his career. However, as an active politician who rarely reflected on his actions retrospectively, his writings and actions tended to be contextual, so that we find him adopting a range of stances at different junctures. It is these that we shall look at in this chapter. We will first explore Patel's early life and the formation of his political ideas, examine his performance as a politician and freedom fighter

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance Rajmohan Gandhi, *Patel, A Life*, (Ahmedabad: 1990) and Balraj Krishna, *India's Bismarck, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel*, (Mumbai: 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Howard Spodek, 'Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel at 100', *Economic Political Weekly*, 10 (1975) p. 1926.

<sup>3</sup> See B. Krishna, *India's Bismarck* and D.V. Tahmankar, *Sardar Patel*, (London, 1970).

<sup>4</sup> Rafiq Zakaria, *Vallabhbhai Patel and Indian Muslims. An Analysis of his relations with Muslims before and after India's partition*, (Mumbai, 1996).

in Gujarat, and then go on to assess his stance in the post-independence period, when he was in a position of great political power.

### Early life and career in Gujarat

Vallabhbhai Patel was born in 1875 in his mother's town of Nadiad and brought up on his paternal village of Karamsad within a rural family that belonged to the Patidars of Charotar in central Kheda. They were a dominant group of this district, an area highly politicised.<sup>5</sup> The Patidars or Patels enjoyed important political influence; an instance of this was their acting as *matadars*, that is to say, being responsible for collecting the revenue from their lineage, a fact which allowed them to exert domination over poorer peasants.<sup>6</sup> But even when this system, known as *narva*, was no longer functional, the patidars became private landowners confirming their domination over lower classes.<sup>7</sup> They were also aware of the importance of exercising power since in many cases they were the headmen of the villages.<sup>8</sup>

Independence and leadership are some of the features attributed to the Patidars as a community in general.<sup>9</sup> Hard-working and blunt, Patidars were said to see their community fellows as brothers but were supposed to be arrogant by showing a sense of superiority towards non-Patidar communities.<sup>10</sup> This way, many anecdotes of young Vallabhbhai are supposed to tell of his independence and self-confidence: the challenging of his teachers

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<sup>5</sup> Spodek, 'Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel at 100', p. 1925; David Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat*.

<sup>6</sup> Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat*, p. 37.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>8</sup> Spodek, 'Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel at 100', p. 1925.

<sup>9</sup> Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat*; Tahmankar, *Sardar Patel*; Spodek, 'Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel at 100' and Rajmohan Gandhi, *Patel: A Life*.

<sup>10</sup> Rajmohan Gandhi, *Patel: A Life*, p. 4.

whenever they acted unfairly, his decision at self-education in order not to be abused by a teacher<sup>11</sup>, or his promotion of another teacher for the municipal committee of Nadiad against an arrogant Patidar with everything playing in his favour.<sup>12</sup> In addition, it is also said that Vallabhbhai's family had a rebellious tradition. His father, for instance, is said to have joined the 1857 revolt.<sup>13</sup> While taking these anecdotes with a pinch of salt, we may say that this social background helped to determine his social being and later political role.

In 1897 Vallabhbhai succeeded in passing the district pleaders' examination in Nadiad and several years later, he went to London to be qualified as a barrister. But before joining Middle Temple in England in 1910, he and his elder brother, Vithalbhai, practised in Godhra and then in Borsad. These were good years for both brothers who consolidated a name for being able to 'ensure the acquittal of almost any accused criminal.'<sup>14</sup> Although after some time in Borsad Vallabhbhai was able to save money for leaving, he postponed his decision to allow his elder brother Vithalbhai to go first.

Thus he moved to London from 1910 to 1913 where he proved to have a strong discipline not only by walking many miles daily to reach the law school, but by spending many hours a day studying at the library since he could not afford the books.<sup>15</sup> At his return he practised in Ahmedabad as a criminal lawyer, rather than in the more prestigious and

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> See Tahmankar, *Sardar Patel* and Spodek, 'Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel at 100'.

<sup>13</sup> The Kheda Non-Cooperation Movement, Nagpur flag Agitation and Borsad Satyagraha, *The Collected Works of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel* (CWSVP), ed. P. N. Chopra (Delhi, 1990), I, p. ix and Rajmohan Gandhi, *Patel: A Life*, p. 6

<sup>14</sup> Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists*, p. 76

<sup>15</sup> Tahmankar, *Sardar Patel*.

lucrative Bombay City.<sup>16</sup> In 1917 and up to 1922 he was municipal councillor in Ahmedabad where he challenged the British Municipal Commissioner, John Shillidy. Vallabhbhai complained about ‘the retrograde attitude of the Municipal Commissioner and his uncivilized behaviour’<sup>17</sup> when dealing with issues of the municipality. Patel’s attitude was justified by the fact that it was later discovered that Shillidy was guilty of irregular – even corrupt – practices, such as giving undue consideration to the owner of a match factory.<sup>18</sup> These years were also important because he showed affinity in doing grassroots work by relieving victims of the flood and the plague. Courageously, he remained in Ahmedabad at a time when the plague was raging through the city.<sup>19</sup>

The assessment of his work as a municipal authority and his attitude towards colonial administrators leads us to inquire on the kind of nationalism Vallabhbhai endorsed, since in contrast to many of his contemporaries, Vallabhbhai was not intimidated by the British officers, as shown in Shidilly’s episode. On the contrary it is clear that Vallabhbhai was fond of this kind of defiant attitude, and indeed it was Gandhi’s ability to stand up for what was right that had attracted him to the Mahatma in the first place.<sup>20</sup> Working with Gandhi, his earlier admiration for the British turned into an assertive nationalism that was reflected in 1918 in the way he changed from his western-style suit to Indian dress.<sup>21</sup>

The nationalism that Vallabhbhai Patel forged for himself during these years corresponded to what we have in the introductory chapter characterised as ‘anti-colonial

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> The Kheda non Cooperation Movement, CWSVP, I, p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> Rajmohan Gandhi, *Patel: A Life*. p. 39.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 41

<sup>21</sup> Howard Spodek, ‘Vallabhbhai Patel at 100’. p. 1927



nationalism'. Nonetheless, his views at times were in accord with that other category we have set out, namely 'cultural nationalism'. He believed that under colonial rule 'India [was] the garden of slaves in which some are big, some are small, some are brave but all are slaves. If any of you think that you observe religion, it is non-sense. A slave has no religion.'<sup>22</sup> In this context he believed that all Indians had the responsibility and the right to free themselves from the foreign yoke,<sup>23</sup> which for Vallabhbhai was undeniably embodied in the figure of colonial administration. However, his anti-colonialism was not exclusive and there was a space for both political and cultural nationalisms during his political performance just as members of the Hindu Mahasabha and the Arya Samaj kept a link with the Congress in spite of promoting an antagonism apparently alien to this party. In this sense, Vallabhbhai did not express at any moment a strong opposition against these well-known communal organizations.

In addition, it is difficult to trace Vallabhbhai's nationalist ideology since he did not write about it in a formal way, but his ideas and notions can be grasped from his speeches and campaigns during the freedom movement. For instance, his anti-colonial nationalism was channelled through his active participation during *satyagrahas*, the campaigns of different social and political issues launched by Gandhi and strongly supported by Vallabhbhai Patel, who, in fact, became the main leader in some of them.

In this same line, some of the activities to show his anti-imperialism were the boycott of foreign products, mainly textiles and the promotion, in contrast, of traditional clothes and the manufacturing of *khadi*, which was a way of reviving the national textile industry, all of

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<sup>22</sup> Copy of Confidential Report dated 5/1/35 from S.H. S.I S.S. Mankad, Ahmedabad. Activities of Vallabhbhai Patel in Gujarat after his release from jail in July 1934, HDSB, file 800 (98) 1935. p. 77.MSA(B).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

this with the ultimate goal of achieving independence. The consumption of locally made textiles was emblematic of people's resistance since

The foreigners who first came from England took down photographs of spinning wheels and weavers' hand-looms. They copied these models in manufacturing their machines erected factories and began to produce and export cloth in large quantities. They cut off the thumbs of our weavers and ruined our industries.<sup>24</sup>

This locates him in a nationalist trend more committed to eradicate the foreign rule in India than to assail the minorities like Muslims and try to impose on them a homogeneous cultural pattern of a Hindu type. In these initial campaigns he believed that Hindu-Muslim unity was not possible if colonial rule remained in India. However, in contrast with this attitude, his position before Muslims in post-Partition India registered a transformation and showed an increasing distrust of the members of this community. Then, Vallabhbhai's campaigning in Gujarat can be considered as his most anti-colonial nationalist performance which would contrast to Vallabhbhai's task of the integration of states after partition revealing a more rigid stance towards Muslims. This entailed a shift towards a more cultural nationalism.

Initially, Patel became best-known as a peasant leader. He worked under Gandhi's leadership in the Kheda Satyagraha of 1918, but acted as the overall leader during the Borsad Satyagraha of 1923 (Gandhi was at that time in jail), and again in the Bardoli Satyagraha of 1928, when Gandhi deliberately kept away from the area to allow Patel unhindered control. In these three campaigns, he proved himself to be an excellent mass organiser, with the ability to both motivate the peasantry and enforce solidarity with the cause.<sup>25</sup> It has been said that his association with Gandhi created a working duo in which one was the schemer and the

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<sup>24</sup> English abstract of the speech delivered by Mr. Vallabhbhai J. Patel at Kurai in the Karjan taluka on 30-11-1937. Speeches delivered by political agitators. Huzur Political Office, CD, daftar 5, file 130. BRO (VG).

<sup>25</sup> It seems that Gandhi at some point considered Vallabhbhai a good agitator. Letter from Gandhi to Mahadev Desai, 22 September 1929, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, (New Delhi, 1970), 41, p. 453.

other one the executor. Put in Howard Spodek's words, Gandhi stood for the moral authority whereas the Sardar represented the strong arm.<sup>26</sup> Another way of looking at it is that while Gandhi provided the moral justification, Patel applied hard-headed methods that could involve form of pressure and coercion that Gandhi would have preferred to avoid. He utilized practices found within the Patidar community – such as caste boycotts – to pressurize peasants to join the protests and remain firm within them. Gandhi disagreed with any kind of social pressure to mobilize people in his satyagrahas because this did not accord with his idea of *ahimsa*, or nonviolence. This was not Vallabhbhai's case in spite of being so close to Gandhi. He did not have any problem at using stronger measures and saw in caste boycott an effective form of persuasion.<sup>27</sup>

However, the kind of action undertaken by Vallabhbhai is closely related to his understanding of the notion of *ahimsa* because 'he wasn't sure that he was an ahimsa-believer'.<sup>28</sup> For him 'non violence does not mean weakness or timidity. There should be spirit and bravery in non-violence and we are lacking in this respect.'<sup>29</sup> His conception for *ahimsa* is ambiguous and embodies a certain dose of bellicosity, an element which he utilized or exhorted to utilize whenever it was required like when dealing with the merging of princely states into India. Therefore, even if there was no physical violence by forcing the peasants to join the campaigns there was a strong psychological pressure or hostility in the threat of ostracizing or fining the non-participative peasants.

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<sup>26</sup> Spodek, 'Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel at 100'. p. 1928.

<sup>27</sup> Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat*. passim, and Spodek, 'Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel at 100', p. 1928.

<sup>28</sup> Rajmohan, *Patel. A Life*, p. 70.

<sup>29</sup> Activities of Vallabhbhai Patel in Gujarat, HDSB, file 800 (98) 1935. MSA (B).

His speeches elaborated the notion of taking action to overcome difficulties. For him it was peasants themselves who were to be blamed for their present plight. He stated in a speech that ‘the farmers are foolish and have no faith: otherwise the land will not go, it will remain here. The reason of your poverty is that you don’t know your motherland. You have lost your true heroism. Even a pattawala can beat a Rajput... The true Rajput spirit is dead and gone.’<sup>30</sup> Thus he demanded from peasants a combativeness to confront colonial rule, which can even be translated in the possibility of losing life as he constantly referred in his speeches. He called to put aside fear of dying because in his view ‘if anything is born with man it is death’.<sup>31</sup>

At times he even seemed to concede that violence could be sometimes justifiable, for instance, in a letter to K.M. Munshi, Patel expressed:

Situation obtaining in Bombay is terrible. Do you think any organized front against it well-nigh impossible? How can a few volunteers, even if they believe in defensive violence be a match for those who stab from behind and then flee? ...real remedy for it must be something quite different. Hence it would be worthwhile only if you can find out the true remedy for this malady, otherwise it will hardly serve any...

When the trouble broke out at Ahmedabad, the people were taken by surprise. Had there been a good number of persons to put up a fight against it, everything would have been saved or alternatively, there would have been heavy massacre. But your situation at present is quite different. Your atmosphere also appears to be quite different. Mature consideration is needed to find a way out of this.<sup>32</sup>

This letter is out of the scope of the satyagrahas in Gujarat and in a period of broader antagonism between Hindu and Muslim community. However, there seems to be an empathic position to ‘defensive violence’ and also a partial stance in which a particular group is identified as aggressor whereas other as victim.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> English abstract of the speech delivered by Mr. Vallabhbhai J. Patel at Kurai in the Karjan taluka on 30-11-1937. Speeches delivered by political agitators, Huzur Political Office, CD, daftar 5, file 130. BRO (VG).

<sup>32</sup> Letter from Patel to K.M. Munshi dated the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 1941. Munshi Private Papers, reel 19, file 15. p. 68-69. NMML (D).

Patel is referring to some hostilities that broke out in Delhi in 1941. The interesting aspect in his depiction is that violence is branded as ‘defensive’ an adjective which provides a feature of justification to this action and that reciprocates to some extent the constant calls to violence, defensive violence, on the part of the Hindu Mahasabha or the Arya Samaj. He seems to state that violence is sometimes necessary and can be useful, but another solution should be found if this defensive violence failed. As for his reference to Ahmedabad, it clarifies his thinking that hostilities could have been sorted out had there been enough people to fight, that would have made the difference, and ‘everything would have been saved’. What would the implication be? That confrontation is possible if there are equal numbers to oppose the aggressors?

But his speech addressed to Amhmedabadis after his release from prison and after the riots in 1941 which he is referring to in the letter added confusion to the situation while blaming people for their supposed cowardly attitude

I heard of what took place during the riots in this city... what possessed you so suddenly that you started cutting each other's throats? Some hundred innocent men died for no reason. If even ten had been bold enough to stand up to the miscreants, this would not have happened. I must tell you that Gandhiji was deeply hurt, for Ahmedabad had made him look foolish. You then approached the Government and asked for enquiry!... In future do not ever run away. Put up the defence. The whole world is doing that. If you can, face your enemy with a superior force, i.e. Gandhiji's path of non-violence. Whether you are a Hindu or a Muslim, stand up and face your enemy, but do not seek to excuse your cowardliness on the ground of non-violence. During these riots there was no sign of non-violence. We have made non-violence an excuse for our cowardice.<sup>33</sup>

The message sounds ambiguous. He questioned people about the murder in the city during the riots but at the same time he questioned them for not confronting the aggressors while keeping loyal to a non-violent stance. He also demanded from people not to be cowards and face the enemy. A point of interest is then, to inquire about the way these groups understood

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<sup>33</sup> Narhari Parikh cited in Rafiq Zakaria, *Vallabhbhai Patel and Indian Muslims*, p. 21.

his message. Although he might be referring to opposing violence by Shanti Sena or peace army, the problem is that his discourse was not necessarily clear about non-violent defence.

Hence, Vallabhbhai's ahimsa scheme was not a Gandhian one because the Mahatma had a very ideal notion of non-violence. Although he did not approve exerting coercion he allowed Vallabhbhai to organize the campaigns as he thought it was effective since he trusted him. Gandhi was more idealistic and because of this he was disappointed a number of times by peasants detaching from the non-violent stance. Sometimes demonstrations went out of control producing some hostile episodes that made Gandhi think that people did not understand his message. For instance, the Chauri Chaura incident in the context of the Khilafat non-cooperation movement in February 1922 in which twenty two policemen were burnt alive created a deep feeling of disillusionment in Gandhi making him to fast as expiation for this act. Thus religiosity was a fundamental element in Gandhian nationalism and in several of his followers.

But Vallabhbhai did not undertake these campaigns in isolation, he supported himself in the networks and activities of local leaders and in many cases, 'many movements subsequently headed by Patel... had been organised at least partially by local men even before Patel was asked to provide supervision.'<sup>34</sup> This way, even though Vallabhbhai assumed a subordinated position in relation to Gandhi, and later, to Nehru, he enjoyed considerable independence in leading protests and in forging a particularly strong Congress machine in Gujarat.<sup>35</sup> In all this, he was ruthless in marginalising any other Congress leaders in Gujarat who tried to challenge his supremacy.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Spodek, 'Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel at 100', p. 1932.

<sup>35</sup> For further elaboration on Patel's organisation of the Gujarat Congress, see *ibid.*, p. 1929-1933.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1931.

On the other hand, along with the coercive dimension of the campaigns it is worth looking at the rhetoric Vallabhbhai utilized to establish communicative channels with people.<sup>37</sup> The discursive strategy was as fundamental as intimidation because it included religious imagery that by being familiar to people could persuade and create in them an ethical responsibility for taking part in the campaigns. Thus, there are at least three aspects shaping Vallabhbhai's rhetoric: national fervour, ethics and religiosity. By addressing people in this way he expected to produce identification and subsequently active support for the nationalist cause. Because even if satyagrahas were carried out to improve conditions for the peasants or satisfy specific demands, the people directly affected were not always willing to take part in them. As Ghanshyam Shah has shown for the particular case of Bardoli, sometimes these groups were afraid to confront the authorities.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, Vallabhbhai attempted to infuse a sense of duty, responsibility and enthusiasm through his speeches and sometimes also guilt for not taking part in the campaigns. He conveyed to the peasants the message that

our fight is for truth and that is what Satyagraha means. It is a fight between the people and a blind government. The government have[sic] decided to forcibly realize land revenue and the people have taken a vow that they would respectfully disregard and disobey the immoral orders to the government and if the government uses coercion, the people would accept all the troubles, but would not pay land revenue.<sup>39</sup>

Grounded on an ethical basis, Vallabhbhai's discourse in the Kheda satyagraha attempted to counter the authority of the government, exhorting people to resist what he described as a bland and immoral government. From this perspective the opposition to the government was rather a moral issue and sometimes it acquired a religious dimension. Patel thus urged the

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<sup>37</sup> The discursive formations implemented in Bardoli are clearly explored by Ghanshyam Shah in 'Traditional society'.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> The Kheda Non-Cooperation Movement, *CWSVP*, 1, p. 14.

peasants ‘to fight this injustice, to refuse to pay the tax and, for the sake of their self-respect, patiently to bear whatever hardships they may have to as a consequence.’<sup>40</sup> Thus ‘for the sake of self-respect’ he admonished Borsad peasants again in 1923 to resist the government no matter what the hardships.

One point of interest is that the concept of hardship and sacrifice is a constant aspect in his discursive strategy and it was closely related to religion, since ‘religion requires the sacrifice of the dearest thing even.’<sup>41</sup> By addressing people in religious terms, by demanding ‘a religious approach to [the] struggle’<sup>42</sup> he articulated the national movement as a sacred duty and its leaders such as Gandhi and even himself as the depositories of moral authority and in the case of Gandhi even as a saintly figure capable of consecrating the land he visited.<sup>43</sup>

Then for the sake of the nation and religion, he thought that both he and the peasants ‘must be prepared to suffer more’<sup>44</sup> in order to resist tyranny and injustice but at the same time he thought that ‘the more tyranny Gujarat suffers, the more sanctified will it become.’<sup>45</sup> Vallabhbhai was a religious man that believed in God and providence, but this did not undermine the existence of a calculated scheme in incorporating religion as an important element to seize people’s empathy. And the local leaders subordinated to him also believed this necessary congratulating themselves for the ‘lack of “intellectualism”’ among the people

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 277.

<sup>41</sup> Activities of Vallabhbhai Patel in Gujarat, HDSB, file 800 (98) 1935. MSA, (B).

<sup>42</sup> Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, *Sardar Vallabhbhaina Bhashano*, (Ahmedabad, 1949), p. 84.

<sup>43</sup> ‘The land of this sea coast has been consecrated because Mahatma Gandhi came here today’. The Kheda Non-Cooperation Movement, CWSVP, 1, p. 12.

<sup>44</sup> Fortnightly Confidential reports from 11<sup>th</sup> August 1934 to 31<sup>st</sup> July 1936. Huzur Political Office, CD, BROCC 26, file 26. BRO (VG).

<sup>45</sup> K.M. Munshi and Vallabhbhai Patel correspondence, Munshi Private Papers, reel 19, file 15. NMML (D).



in Bardoli that made possible for them to join the satyagraha without asking too many questions and mainly out of faith.<sup>46</sup>

But the religious language Vallabhbhai knew was the one of his cultural background, therefore, he used vocabulary from Hinduism to describe their fight, such as comparing the national struggle with the fight between Ram-Ravana, from the great epic of the Ramayan. He referred to *dharma* when speaking of the duty to join the national campaigns, or talked about *shakti* for referring the strength to fight the British.<sup>47</sup>

In this sense even the Congress meetings were depicted with a halo of religiosity, ‘in this country, numerous people go on pilgrimage to Pandharpur, Benares, Brindaban and also attend such things such as Kumbha Mela. The Congress session is, however, a National “Mela” (fair) and those who attend it imbibe ideas of duty towards their motherland’.<sup>48</sup> The Congress session of 1937 was described in this fashion and the topic to be discussed was the ‘country’s salvation’.<sup>49</sup> The nationalist meetings clarified the general objectives of the freedom struggle. Vallabhbhai noted that ‘Mahatma has started this movement not only against the government but against ourselves. We have to purify the Government and also do self purification.’<sup>50</sup> Thus the national movement provided the Indian people with the

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<sup>46</sup> Ghanshyam Shah, ‘Traditional society’. p. 94.

<sup>47</sup> Independence and civil defence movement. Extracts of speeches of Vallabhbhai Patel and other Congress discouraging the payment of land revenue in Gujarat district, HDSB, file 750 (86)I, 1930-1931, p. 47-49. MSA (B).

<sup>48</sup> English abstract of the speech delivered by Mr. Vallabhbhai J. Patel at Kurai in the Karjan taluka on 30-11-1937. Speeches delivered by political agitators. Huzur Political Office, CD, daftar 5, file 130. BRO (VG).

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Activities of Vallabhbhai Patel in Gujarat after his release from jail in July 1934, HDSB, file 800 (98), 1935. MSA (B).

possibility to expiate sins besides opposing the government. In other words, it was a campaign to sort out issues at a personal and social level.

Salvation then would be achieved through an active participation in social matters but also by following a right individual behavior, or what was considered to be a right conduct. In this sense, Vallabhbhai's message was also permeated with a normative ingredient. Among other things, cleanliness, wearing khadi, no child marriage, no petty quarrels, no idleness, no discrimination against untouchables were some key aspects promoted in Vallabhbhai's discourses that have an evident interconnectedness in individual and collective spheres. Other elements were opium eating and alcohol consumption since both actions should be considered, according to Vallabhbhai's view, 'vices which require to be condemned by everyone'.<sup>51</sup> Issues such as khadi promotion, the eradication of untouchability and temperance were dealt with in the constructive programme. When anti-drink and anti-drug sabhas were established in 1929, adherents were required to take an oath that stated that:

I hereby pledge myself to support the enactment of laws for the total prohibition of intoxicating drinks and drugs as indispensable for the moral, economic and social welfare, and progress of our country. I further declare that in any election to local bodies and provincial and all-India legislative bodies I shall not vote for or support any candidate who has not signed the pledge in support of total prohibition.<sup>52</sup>

Apparently the signing of the pledge was not compulsory but for candidates who wanted to gain votes it had a forcible dimension. In this respect, the objective of the sabhas was the total abolition of drug and alcohol consumption and their programme included the 'peaceful picketing of liquor and drug shops'<sup>53</sup> after the sanction of the Provincial Sub-Committee.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> M. K. Gandhi, 'Prohibition Campaign', *Young India* (1919-1931), (Ahmedabad, 23 May 1929), XI, p. 171.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

This way the sacrifice demanded from the people for the sake of the nation was not only in terms of political activities and resisting the onslaughts and punishments from the government but also a self-controlled and temperate behavior in order to achieve progress for the country. This progress demanded a joint action of all sectors and communities in India, thus Vallabhbhai also called people for unity. However, although much has been said about Vallabhbhai's promotion of Hindu-Muslim unity, it seemed to be a marginal issue in his speeches in the particular period of the satyagrahas in Gujarat, because 'Gujarat has not much to do regarding Hindu-Muslim unity in comparison with other provinces, so Gujarat has much scope for diverting its energy in other programme [*sic*]'.<sup>54</sup> And this situation was not exactly groundless since official reports for some cities of this region were specific in explaining how the situation between Hindus and Muslims had gone worse only from 1924<sup>55</sup>.

But Vallabhbhai's aloofness in respect to Hindu-Muslim unity was present from the Khilafat years. He, as other Congress members such as Indulal Yagnik, did not support without suspicion this cause because of its rather dubious claims.<sup>56</sup> While Gandhi proclaimed that 'I would gladly ask for postponement of *swaraj* if thereby we could advance the interests of Khilafat',<sup>57</sup> Patel questioned 'how can we fight for the Muslims of Arabia and Palestine, Syria and Iraq? It is only meaningful if we first achieve freedom and then fight for others'.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> The Kheda non Cooperation Movement, CWSVP, I, p. 235.

<sup>55</sup> See chapter three in this research, pp. 6-7.

<sup>56</sup> Hamza Alavi has noticed how the Khilafat movement in India appealed to the most backward premises of Islam considering the Caliph as monarch and religious leader, differently to the original Islam that distinguished between the two separate domains. Then, instead of questioning the figure of the Caliph in its supposed religiosity and universality it was only taken for granted and Kalam Azad mobilized Indian Muslims on this basis which reinforced the religious character of the movement and later, of Muslim nationalism as a whole. See Hamza Alavi, 'Ironies of History: Contradictions of the Khilafat Movement', p. 35

<sup>57</sup> B. Krishna, *India's Bismarck*, p. 81.

<sup>58</sup> Indulal Yagnik, *Atmakatha*, cited in Yagnik and Sheth, *The Shaping of Modern Gujarat*, p. 207-208.

But through loyalty to Gandhi, Vallabhbhai Patel finally advocated the Khilafat movement and provided his reasons for this

The Turkish Empire was divided in spite of Britain's promise. The Sultan was made a prisoner in Constantinople. Syria was absorbed by France. Smyrna and Thrace were swallowed by Greece while Mesopotamia and Palestine were taken possession of by the British. In Arabia, too, a ruler was created who would support the British Government. Even the Viceroy admitted that some of the conditions of peace could not but offend the Muslim community. It has, as a matter of fact, been a heart-breaking episode for the Indian Muslims, and how can Hindus stand by unaffected when they see their fellow countrymen, thus, in distress?<sup>59</sup>

This way even with some reticence Vallabhbhai hoisted the Khilafat cause and advised Hindus 'to help protect Islam by rendering every possible assistance to the Muslims by expressing full faith in the goodness of the community'.<sup>60</sup> But the unity coming from the Khilafat was artificial and was put to an end by Gandhi himself who called people to halt the movement when people went out of control by killing several policemen in the Chauri Chaura episode in 1922. Muslims felt disappointed and betrayed. Some of them felt used by Hindus just to achieve swaraj and the communities' gap went deeper.<sup>61</sup>

In addition, the years 1928-1929 were quite problematic in terms of communal hostilities in several places in Gujarat, Godhra and Surat, for instance. But Vallabhbhai did not seem to be particularly concerned about it; his energy was rather consumed by the Bardoli satyagraha. In this context it is interesting to note that there was no explicit criticism at all about Mukadam's aggressive activities in Godhra while the Bardoli campaign was taking place. It is difficult to believe Vallabhbhai was unaware of the violence encouraged by Mukadam, but he appears to have turned a blind eye.<sup>62</sup> This fact reinforces the idea of

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<sup>59</sup> Rafiq Zakaria, *Sardar Patel and Indian Muslims*. p. 5.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>61</sup> Gitasree Bandyopadhyay, *Constraints in Bengal politics: Gandhian Leadership*, (Calcutta: 1984).

<sup>62</sup> For further elaboration about the Patel-Mukadam relation see chapter three.

Congress members not being absolutely committed to the ahimsa principle, the diversity of the Congress was expressed at different junctures and with different nuances during this crucial period. In Vallabhbhai's case, though his speeches were plethoric with allusions to passive resistance and non-violence, his stance against extreme individuals or extremist Hindu nationalist organisations was never strongly condemnatory.

During the period of the Kheda satyagraha Vallabhbhai advised his followers, 'preserve Hindu-Moslem unity; keep on friendly terms with the Parsis; always keep on good terms with the Police and other Government officials as this is very important; be friendly with the Moderates and Swaraj party.'<sup>63</sup> His call for unity was rather general, appealing to different sectors of society but not particularly specific in the issue of Hindus and Muslims. By the 40's his discourse is visibly more focused on this topic, Vallabhbhai expressed 'that the Muslims were not outsiders. They originally belonged to India and were converted from the Hindus. Change of religion made no change in politics. The son of Mr. Gandhi followed Islam and then returned to Hinduism. By becoming a Muslim there was no change in the nationality. [Patel] said that the Hindus and Muslims were all Indians and should therefore cooperate.'<sup>64</sup> It must be pointed out that more than criticizing Muslims for leaving Hinduism, Patel shared the idea of many nationalists, for instance, Gandhi and Arya Samajis, that Hindus themselves were to be blamed for the conversion of different groups into other religions, mainly Islam and Christianity since in many cases the groups that got converted were *dalits* or untouchables, and their particular reason was the discrimination suffered at the hands of caste Hindus. Then Vallabhbhai perceived the conversion of these groups as legitimate since their aim was to improve their social conditions. Thus he noted that 'you

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<sup>63</sup> The Kheda non Cooperation Movement, CWSVP, I, p. 195.

<sup>64</sup> Fortnightly confidential reports from 12<sup>th</sup> August 1945-1948. Huzur Political Office, CD, daftar 6, file 140. BRO (VG).

must not treat the Dheds as untouchables. Why these persons are being converted into other religion... If a Dhed becomes a Christian or a Mussalman he can go freely where he likes.<sup>65</sup> Thus he delegated responsibility on Hindus for rejecting untouchables that opted for their conversion as a way out of discrimination.

With independence and the Partition of India in 1947, the situation changed in profound ways, and this was reflected in Patel's speeches and actions. In the last section of this chapter we shall explore Patel's role in the integration of states and his political stance in the light of this eventful period.

### The integration of states: Hindus, Muslims and the idea of unity

From the 1930s, with the demand for Pakistan moving onto the political agenda, Vallabhbhai began to make more pointed calls for Hindu-Muslim unity. He stated that: 'India is one and indivisible. One cannot divide a sea or split the running waters of a river. The Muslims have their roots in India. Their sacred places and their cultural centres are located in India. I do not know what would they do in Pakistan and it would not be long when they would like to return.'<sup>66</sup> With the Muslim League gaining political ground, Vallabhbhai got distressed with the idea of Jinnah co-opting Muslims and becoming gradually more influential when at the same time Congress Muslims such as Abul Kalam Azad were losing support in the community, and Gandhi had long lost the sympathy of the majority of Muslims.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Activities of Vallabhbhai Pater after his release from jail in July 1934, HDSB, file 800 (98), 1935, p. 47. MSA (B).

<sup>66</sup> CWSVP, XII, p. xvi.

<sup>67</sup> Rafiq Zakaria, *Sardar Patel and Indian Muslims*, p. 17.

In his eagerness for unification he tried to identify a common enemy in the figure of colonialists in India but this happened even in the days of the Khilafat movement. As referred above Patel was a staunch opponent of colonialism and differently to other figures, he did not depict Muslims as past conquerors of India that were said to have oppressed Hindus and Hindu religion. He argued that it was not possible to follow one's religion in a condition of slavery, a plight shared, according to him, by all of the inhabitants of the subcontinent. He depicted India as 'a field of slaves', stating that 'that five lacs of people should rule over three hundred and fifty million is a monstrosity which cannot be found anywhere in the modern world. These three hundred and fifty million include even kings – the rulers of Indian states. These rulers are rulers in name. They may be good or bad but the real power is in the hands of foreigners. All these rulers are subordinate to a Sovereign in England.'<sup>68</sup> He underscored the need for a common front against colonial rule of all groups, rulers included. Vallabhbhai was clear in stating that 'it is the lesson of history that it was owing to the country's politically fragmented condition and our inability to take a united stand that India succumbed to successive waves of invaders. Our mutual conflicts and internecine quarrels and jealousies have in the past been the cause of our downfall and our falling victims to foreign domination a number of times. We cannot afford to fall into those errors or traps again.'<sup>69</sup>

However, although Vallabhbhai publicly spoke of unity among the communities and emphasized their belonging to India, he still felt some alienation regarding Muslims and this was rather expressed privately to Gandhi. Vallabhbhai complained to the Mahatma that 'the manners and customs of Muslims are different. They take meat while we are vegetarians. How are we to live with them in the same place?' And Gandhi replied that 'no, sir. Hindus as

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<sup>68</sup> English abstract of the speech delivered by Mr. Vallabhbhai J. Patel at Kurai in the Karjan taluka on 30/11/1937. Speeches delivered by political agitators. Huzur Political Office, CD, daftar 5, file 130. BRO (VG).

<sup>69</sup> *CWSVP*, XII, p. xiii.

a body are nowhere vegetarians except in Gujarat. Almost every Hindu takes meat in the Punjab, U.P. and Sind<sup>70</sup>. Thus even if his public discourse refers to a common citizenship of Hindus and Muslims and other creeds, Vallabhbhai had his prejudices against a community of ‘meat-eaters’. This simple issue seemed to create a real tension for him as to question the possibility of a common coexistence because of different dietary habits.

But apart from his prejudices against Muslims, he tried to temperate his attitude, this way, he also advised against the ‘habit of suspecting each other’ because this led to disunity<sup>71</sup>. Once partition had occurred, however, his prejudices came out once more. The horrors of that time exacerbated communal tensions and mutual suspicion, and Patel failed to rise above this. He spoke of ‘much enmity between the two communities. In Calcutta, Lahore and Bombay wherever you go you will see that mini Pakistans have been formed. No Hindu can enter Muslim locality. No Hindu is able to stay in Rawalpindi...’<sup>72</sup> This context of violence and confrontation reshaped Vallabhbhai’s stance towards Muslims staying in India.

After partition, the Indian states were left with three options: accession to India, to Pakistan or to remain independent. Being in charge of the Home Department, Patel was responsible for the integration of the states. Particularly problematic was the case of Junagadh that took the last minute decision of merging to Pakistan and Hyderabad that considered staying independent with the possibility or the risk of joining later to Pakistan. Another big issue in these terms was Kashmir, but Nehru decided to take the prime

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<sup>70</sup> Rafiq Zakaria, *Sardar Patel and Indian Muslims*, p. 18.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>72</sup> Vallabhbhai Patel, *For a United India: Speeches of Sardar Patel, 1947-1950*. (Delhi: 1967). p. 158.



responsibility for these negotiations, though Patel gave his full support to the military action that effectively prevented the valley of Kashmir falling into Pakistani hands.<sup>73</sup>

Junagadh was an Indian state whose Muslim ruler, Nawab Mahabat Khan, decided to accede to Pakistan without considering that 80% of Junagadh's population was Hindu and only 20% were Muslims. But this decision was conceived in a sort of secret scheme by the ruler who in April 1947 had referred to the project of 'the formation of a self-contained group of Kathiawar states.'<sup>74</sup> Thus the announcement of Junagadh merging into Pakistan came by surprise and was found out in the 17<sup>th</sup> of August newspaper reports by Vallabhbhai Patel who immediately investigated if Pakistan accepted the accession.<sup>75</sup>

The geographical location of Junagadh on the seacoast of the Arabian Sea, meant the possibility for Pakistan to have imminent presence in Indian territory, since this state was not contiguous to Pakistan although there was a straight route by sea to Karachi. Voices in India 'alleged that the accession of Junagadh to Pakistan was calculated "to cause disruption in the integrity of India by extending influence and boundaries of Pakistan" and was "an encroachment of India's sovereignty and territory and was inconsistent with friendly relations that should exist between the two dominions.'"<sup>76</sup>

Moreover, the issue of Junagadh was important for setting a precedent for other states considering joining Pakistan, for instance, Hyderabad which had been given a period to decide. Then by September 24 Vallabhbhai had sent some Indian troops to Junagadh frontiers

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<sup>73</sup> Rajmohan, *Patel: A Life*. p. 435; Andrew Whitehead, *A Mission in Kashmir* (New Delhi, 2007), pp.111-12, 157.

<sup>74</sup> B. Krishna, *India's Bismarck*, p. 121.

<sup>75</sup> For details of the whole episode see *ibid*; Rajmohan Gandhi, *Patel: A Life* and V.P. Menon, *The Story of the Integration of the Indian States*, (reprint, 1969, of orig. edn, Bombay, 1961).

<sup>76</sup> 'Pakistan view of Junagadh events, *The Bombay Chronicle*, 13 November 1947, p. 4.

while waiting for Pakistan to cancel the accession of Junagadh or organise a plebiscite.<sup>77</sup>

Even if the details in the handling of the negotiations are interesting, we shall focus on the discourses conveyed by Vallabhbhai in this crucial moment, since his rhetoric of this period had undergone a visible transformation, becoming far less tolerant towards Muslims.

When the ruler surrendered and fled to Karachi, Vallabhbhai visited Junagadh and delivered a speech in Bahauddin College<sup>78</sup>, an institution that had been decided to be affiliated to Sind University in Karachi when Junagadh acceded to Pakistan.<sup>79</sup> In this speech Vallabhbhai told the audience about the referendum on the accession of Junagadh and he warned the Muslims of Junagadh ‘to leave off their ‘pranks’ and to be faithful to the Indian Union. He said that **‘those who wanted to go away to Pakistan could go there with their property’** [emphasis in the original]. During the assembly, he took an unofficial referendum where the people unanimously voted for merging to the Indian Union.<sup>80</sup>

Vallabhbhai continued in this vein in a speech of 15 November:

those who talked of Pakistan from India would have to pack off to Pakistan bag and baggage [sic] ‘post-haste’ and [that] he would even be prepared to give such people a parting gift...

He warned the Muslims of Kathiawar that if, even now, they persisted in talking in terms of Pakistan, they would have to emulate the example of the Nawab of Junagadh who had run away to Karachi. The Muslims had thought... that Pakistan would bring them heaven on earth, but it had brought hell with it.<sup>81</sup>

The very day of his arrival to Junagadh, on the 13<sup>th</sup> November Vallabhbhai being the Deputy Prime Minister of India, along with Mr. N.V. Gadgil, Minister for Works, Power and Mines

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<sup>77</sup> Rajmohan Gandhi, *Patel: A Life*. p. 436.

<sup>78</sup> *The Bombay Chronicle*, 15 November 1947, p. 9.

<sup>79</sup> B. Krishna, *India's Bismarck*. p. 122.

<sup>80</sup> *The Bombay Chronicle*, 15 November 1947, p. 9.

<sup>81</sup> “Pakistan’s ‘interference’ in Junagadh; Sardar Patel’s criticism”, *The Times of India*, 15 November 1947, p. 9.

visited the temple of lord Somnath in Prabhas Pathan and announced its reconstruction.<sup>82</sup> ‘He was visibly moved to find the temple which had once been the glory of India looking so dilapidated, neglected and forlorn. It was proposed then and there to reconstruct it so as to return it to its original splendour...’<sup>83</sup> This was a sensitive issue in a moment where communal feelings were still running high. Junagadh with its temple of Somnath ‘was [supposedly] considered by Hindus as the most sacred place after Kashi... for it was there that Sri Krishna shuffled off his mortal coil and Somnath had been destroyed by Mahmud Ghazni.’<sup>84</sup> This decision conveyed a message of Hindu prevalence over other religious creeds. Noting this Gandhi had advised that the reconstruction was not carried out with government funds but only with public subscriptions, this was underlined during the ceremony of installation of the Somnath idol in 1951.<sup>85</sup> However, the presence of government authorities in the announcement of the reconstruction and later, in the inaugural ceremony attended by the president Rajendra Prasad, spread the message of a government that sponsored and advocated the religion of the majority.

However, while it was Vallabhbhai who announced the reconstruction of the temple, K.M. Munshi strongly supported and participated in the scheme, both worked together to have the project crystallized.<sup>86</sup> But as we will see in chapter six, Munshi was the most enthusiastic person in promoting the reconstruction of Somnath and in disseminating a narrative of permanent conflict between Hinduism and Islam. His writing of *Somnath, the Shrine Eternal*—sold as a souvenir the inaugural day of Somnath—culminated his campaign

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<sup>82</sup> *The Times of India*, 15 November 1947, p. 9.

<sup>83</sup> Menon, *The Integration of the Indian States*, p. 141.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>85</sup> *The Bombay Chronicle*, 12 May 1951, p. 4.

<sup>86</sup> Parita Mukta, ‘On the Political Culture of Authoritarianism’, p. 66.

for the temple. This campaign set a precedent and became inspirational for Hindu nationalist organizations in launching similar crusades for the reconstruction of other Hindu temples to the detriment of Muslim shrines such as the case of Ayodhya and the demolition of the Babri Masjid in December 1992. L.K. Advani, Bharatiya Janata party leader, started his tour for the reconstruction of the supposed Ram's temple in Ayodhya, in Somnath which led to the eventual destruction of the sixteenth century Babar mosque.

On the other hand, the case of Hyderabad and its signing of a standstill agreement on the 29<sup>th</sup> November 1947 which provided the Nizam with a year to think about the accession to India increased in Vallabhbhai a suspicious attitude towards Muslims. From the beginning of the conflict Patel had the idea of sending the army to sort out the situation. Thus he expressed in a letter written to a person named Sushila of the 10<sup>th</sup> of September 1948 that 'the action against Hyderabad would already have commenced ere this letter reaches to your hands. Had we acted betimes, we would rather have been saved from the present enormous difficulties. But mine was a lone voice. Now all have come to my viewpoint. But it is too late now and we shall have to reap its sour fruits...' <sup>87</sup>.

The crisis of the moment along with the information Vallabhbhai received from day-to-day must have alarmed him but not to the point of not realizing that some issues were 'based on authentic information while many are either just rumours or are based on some misconception' <sup>88</sup> as he himself replied to the information circulated about Hyderabad purchasing ex-military vehicles from Calcutta and Bombay and also about the Nizam

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<sup>87</sup> *Sardar's Letters Mostly Unknown II*, ed, G.M. Nandurkar and Manibehn Vallabhbhai Patel, (Ahmedabad, 1977), V, p. 119.

<sup>88</sup> Integrating Indian States, *Sardar Patel's Correspondence, 1945-1950*, VII, p. 115.

purchasing weapons in England to arm the Muslims that had migrated to Pakistan.<sup>89</sup> But together with this information, the dogmatic rhetoric of the Nizam side was not helpful in visualizing a political solution to the conflict. Excerpts from Kasim Razvi's speech on 31 March 1948 stated that

Hyderabad is an Islamic State. The Indian Union is trying to wipe out this Muslim rule from the Deccan. Remember that there are four and a half crores of Muslims in the Dominion, looking to us to raise the banner of this Islamic State. It has been founded by the Muslim rulers with their blood and money. Asaf Jahi dynasty is the leader of this State. We should maintain our individual character by remaining independent... Ittehad expects every Muslim to do his duty. The time is not far off when we have to throw our entire weight to maintain the integrity of this Islamic State. We have been ruling the Deccan for the last 800 years and we shall rule it whether the Indian Union likes it or not... We have to shed our last drop of blood to maintain this State...<sup>90</sup>

The belligerent rhetoric of the Hyderabad Muslim elites was an important factor poisoning the atmosphere. In addition, there was the actuation of violent groups such as the Ittehad-ul-Mussalmeen, a militant organisation that terrorised the non-Muslim population in Hyderabad as a strategy for their demand of an independent state that might later join Pakistan.<sup>91</sup>

More influential in Vallabhbhai's state of mind towards Muslims was the first-hand testimonies as told by the refugees coming from Pakistan. He went by himself to the camps and talked to the people who told him of the horrors they had lived while leaving their homes. Thus in a letter to Nehru he described that

From morning till night these days, my time is here fully occupied with the talks of woe and atrocities which reach me through Hindu and Sikh refugees from all over Western Pakistan. People from Quetta, Sind and West Punjab give lurid accounts of what these two

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 112, 114.

<sup>90</sup> *Sardar's Letters Mostly Unknown II*, V, p. 101.

<sup>91</sup> Integrating Indian States, *Sardar Patel's Correspondence, 1945-1950*, VII, p. 109.

communities are passing through. These accounts are also being spread by word of mouth all over Delhi and surrounding areas.<sup>92</sup>

The question of the refugees increased the tension. In addition, according to information received by Vallabhbhai there was an asymmetrical situation that made Hindu people feel upset. Thus Patel told Nehru

You know the mass psychology; they all now feel that it is due to our “conciliatory and weak-kneed policy” in dealing with the whole refugee and communal problem which is responsible for the present difficulties and that the only answer to atrocities in West Punjab is a flare-up in the rest of India. People are openly clamouring as to why Muslims are allowed to go about in peace openly in the streets of Delhi and other towns, why there are any Muslims at all in the police and the civil administration, and are indulging in similar other demands.<sup>93</sup>

He did not always distinguish rumours from real facts. And there was certainly partiality while evaluating the difficulties Hindus and Muslims were suffering. From the perspective of Vallabhbhai, there were roles for villains and victims; for him Hindus and also Sikhs played the latter role whereas the Muslims were the villains. In a letter addressed to Kishorlal T. Mashhruwala editor of the Harijan dated July 23<sup>rd</sup> 1948, Patel wrote about the situation in Hyderabad that

where there is a rule of fanatics, it is futile to expect safety to women folk of other faiths. You know that when Punjab was partitioned and the issue of Kashmir was on the anvil, thousands of Hindu and Sikh women were abducted by the Muslims and Sikhs too had followed the example in many cases. There are reasons to believe that some Hindus must have also smeared their hands by committing such acrimonious acts. The truth is so obvious that it is hazardous to expect any good behaviour from Hyderabad...<sup>94</sup>

In the light of this, Hindus and Sikhs suffered more with the partition and if they became aggressors at any point, it was only following the example set by Muslims. In Vallabhbhai's considerations it was difficult to believe that some Hindus committed 'such acrimonious

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<sup>92</sup> Transfer of Power – Communal Holocaust on Partition – Administration and Stability, *Sardar Patel's Correspondence, 1945-1950*, IV, p. 318.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> *Sardar's Letters Mostly Unknown II*, V, p. 118.

acts'. He observed that 'in Rawalpindi and Multan districts, several villages have been turned to ashes. Both Hindus and Sikhs have been the victim of this wrath. But the Sikhs have suffered more. People fought with bravery. Many women jumped into wells and embraced death. People resisted with all their might and when they found themselves surrounded by the hostile crowd, they fought and died as suicide squads. Several people have fallen prey to the bullets.'<sup>95</sup> He took this for granted and overlooked international media reports about Sikhs aggressions on Muslims by profiting from their military training and also the reports about women being forced to throw themselves into the wells.

In this situation, Vallabhbhai proved once again to be a man of action and one of the most unfortunate political measures was his responsibility in providing Hindus in Delhi with weapons. He had received a letter from Rajendra Prasad the 5<sup>th</sup> September 1947 that basically demanded that Hindus be armed for self-defence to counter, in turn, the arming of Muslims by the Nizam of Hyderabad who supposedly had been providing weapons to Muslims in Delhi. Vallabhbhai's reply to Prasad's letter stated that

Regarding arms licences, we have already given licences to two or three Hindu dealers for the sale of arms. We have also, during the last six or eight months, been giving arms liberally to non-Muslim applicants, but it would be impossible during the present disturbed conditions of Delhi to embark on any more liberal policy, as in the present atmosphere surcharged with distrust, suspicion and grievances against Muslims for the tragedies of West Punjab, we cannot be certain that this would not be used in aggression against Muslims, thereby resulting in the creation of a complete state of lawlessness.<sup>96</sup>

Undoubtedly this was a controversial decision that could have helped to exacerbate tension even to a higher level. The days of Borsad satyagraha were now gone and so was

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<sup>95</sup> Vallabhbhai Patel, *For a United India: Speeches of Sardar Patel*, p. 18.

<sup>96</sup> Transfer of Power – Communal Holocaust on Partition, *Sardar Patel's Correspondence, 1945-1950*, IV, p. 339.

Vallabhbhai's thinking that 'the way of the gun is wrong'.<sup>97</sup> This way the arming of the population was not particularly committed to non-violence philosophy.

After all these events, the metamorphosis was completed and from being a 'staunch' supporter of Hindu-Muslim unity he became a politician that demanded Muslims show evidence of their loyalties to India. And his speeches were effective, for instance

In public meeting attended by 50,000 in Rajkot November 12 including 12,000 Muslims. The Jamiyat Muslims, the most influential Muslim organization declared in unequivocal terms its decision to dissolve the organization and merge itself with the Junagadh Praja Mandal.

The Muslim leaders, pledging their loyalty to the national tricolor publicly avowed that if the two Dominions were to go to war with each other, the Muslims of Junagadh would fight Pakistan with the forces of the Indian Union.<sup>98</sup>

Grounded in a deepening suspicion, Vallabhbhai was persistent in demanding Muslims to be loyal to India or simply leave. His calls for unity showed a hostile attitude towards Muslims that undoubtedly produced a generalized feeling of distrust among the rest of the population

Those who claim that in this country there are two nations and that there is nothing common between the two, and "that we must have our homeland where we can breathe freely," let them do so. I do not blame them. But those who still have that idea that "they have worked for it, they have got it; and, therefore, they should follow the same path here," to them I respectfully appeal to go and enjoy the fruits of that freedom and leave us in peace.<sup>99</sup>

He called to unity and to stop communal conflicts but at the same time warned that 'now that Pakistan has been established, there should be no more fights between Hindus and Muslims. *If, unfortunately, there would be a recurrence of strife, it would not be the cowardly killings of innocent people, but it would be between two armies of the two State.*<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Vallabhbhai Patel, *Sardar Vallabhbhaina Bhashano*, p. 85.

<sup>98</sup> 'Junagadh Muslims join Mandal', *The Times of India*, 24 November 1947, p. 7.

<sup>99</sup> *Sardar Patel-In Tune with the Millions II*, ed. G.M. Nandukar, (Ahmedabad, 1976), III, pp. 154-155.

<sup>100</sup> Vallabhbhai Patel, *For a United India: Speeches of Sardar Patel*, p. 153 (Emphasis in the original)



His distrust for Muslims was evident even as a Chairman of the Minorities Committee of the Legislative Assembly in 1949 where he expressed his point of view ‘that the Muslims today were a very strong, well-knit and a well-organized minority. Very good! A minority that could force the partition of the country is not a minority at all. Why do you think that you are a minority?’<sup>101</sup> This idea could be alarming since it clearly minimized the condition of this group as a minority and an attitude like this could inhibit solidarity or empathy for the problems of this community underwent. In fact, Vallabhbhai’s efficient action to sort out Hindu problems was hardly reciprocated when he was told about the conditions of Muslim refugees in Delhi.

Although Vallabhbhai was often in this respect in accord with Hindu nationalist sentiments, he did make a point of distancing himself from the RSS after Gandhi’s murder at the hands of a Hindu fundamentalist in January 1948. In a letter to Nehru he expressed that

I am beginning to think as to how long under a democratic set-up we can justify restrictions on this organisation, if their unlawful activities are abjured by them. I have made my views quite clear to Golwalkar, viz. that the Sangh will have to change its entire outlook and its programme before Provincial Governments could be satisfied that these activities would cease to be a menace to the peace and tranquillity of India.<sup>102</sup>

The main difference between Vallabhbhai and the Hindu nationalists was that he was prepared to envisage a place for Muslims in India as equal citizens if they promised to be loyal to the new state, in the process disavowing any conflicting loyalty towards Pakistan. The Hindu nationalists on the other hand propagated the supremacist premise of a Hindu nation where Muslims would be always in a subordinate place, and one moreover in which

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<sup>101</sup> *Sardar Patel-In Tune with the Millions II*, III, p. 156.

<sup>102</sup> Integrating Indian States- Police action in Hyderabad, *Sardar Patel’s Correspondence, 1945-1950*, ed. Durga Das, (Ahmedabad, 1973), VII, p. 261.

Hindus would be considered to have a right to intimidate them by force if needs be. Patel was not prepared to countenance such lawlessness.

In this way Vallabhbhai Patel, who was considered to be ‘the true founder of orderly and viable state through the welter of uncertainty, disorder and confusion that followed partition’<sup>103</sup> was a very influential figure, his apparent subordination to Gandhi or Nehru did not prevent his having a broad space for political manoeuvres. His political career showed his quality as a statesmanship and freedom fighter but his initial anti-colonial nationalism was displaced by a growing suspicion for Indian Muslims. His own cultural milieu but most of all the historical development produced this shift in his perception of the minority community that far from being vulnerable became perceived as a threat to the unity of India if they did not prove to be loyal to the country.

In this context, Vallabhbhai’s personality and ideology underwent a change hand in hand with the development of social events. A key aspect in the transformational process is the historical events that exacerbated anti-Muslim feelings in the several political actors and groups analysed in this research. This is also the case for K.M. Munshi whose oscillating attitude regarding Muslims should also be studied in the light of the historical conditions. Next chapter will delve further into this. Munshi’s thought was more pervasive and expansive since he was also a prolific writer conscious about his activity of spreading his historical constructions through fiction, something he could convey easily to the majority that had supposedly to be educated by a ‘dominant minority’ he belonged to.

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<sup>103</sup> CWSVP, XII, p.ix.

## Chapter six

### The nationalist constructions of K.M. Munshi

This chapter will examine the ideological representations of K. M. Munshi (1887-1971), an influential Gujarati intellectual, novelist and politician. He was born in 1887 in Broach, Gujarat within a Brahmin family and since his early youth became interested in the nationalist movement through the influence of prominent figures such as Aurobindo Ghosh, a radical leader, while studying at Baroda College. Later, he worked as an editor, lawyer, became a writer, an activist, a politician and is widely controversial for his nationalist activities and writings.

His writings include novels, short stories, plays, historical and ‘puranic’ dramas, biographies, articles on literary criticism and miscellaneous essays. He wrote both in Gujarati and English.

#### The problematic in perspective

In general terms, Munshi can be –and, indeed, is— considered from a manifold perspective. His writings, his activities and his thought show several of the distinct facets of this controversial figure as a writer, as a lawyer, as a politician or as a Hindu nationalist exponent. However, any of Munshi’s roles must be seen in the light of an apparently turbulent Indian context where the impact of British colonialism had already stamped its indelible mark. Under the influence of a colonialist discourse of organization, ‘Hindus examined and debated the ‘shape’ of their religion and its objective existence in relation to other religions in the modern world... which enabled Hindu nationalism to emerge in the

early twentieth century as a distinctive and politically influential ideology.”<sup>1</sup> Munshi belongs to that sector in his quest for cultural definition, and whether he is branded as a traditionalist, reactionary or communalist the point to be undertaken here is examining his cultural constructs and appraising their impact in the development of a nationalist ideology as well as scrutinizing the course of his ideas since these underwent visible transformations according to the circumstances of the historical moment. This way Munshi’s evolving ideas have to be considered against the background of a particularly fast-changing and dynamic period in South Asian history –a period in which national identity was being debated and constructed against a backdrop of a series of dramatic nationalist protests and related political developments.

Thus, this chapter will analyze Munshi’s paradigms in the articulation of a nationalist creed both in a regional and national dimension since nationalism is not exclusively concomitant with the margins of the Indian state. Conversely, regional nationalisms are also incorporated in the broader movement at an all India level without being incompatible.<sup>2</sup> Parallel to a national identity configuration, a regional consciousness was being forged and in this, there was a connectedness with the national image of cultural identity. In this sense, Munshi’s depiction of Gujarat is perfectly linked to an idea of Indian nation which, in one of its basic precepts, identifies an ancient Aryan background as the foundation of Indian culture, and that is precisely what Munshi claims for Gujarat, an Aryan past whose cultural impact is indubitably evident in the current period. By exploring his writings, I will attempt to disentangle his ideological interpretations that express his scheme of nation. This includes notions such as his view of culture, Indian history, Indian

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<sup>1</sup> John Zavos, *The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in India*, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed elaboration on national and regional consciousness see Sudir Chandra, ‘Regional Consciousness in 19<sup>th</sup> Century India, pp. 1278-1285.

society and dominant minority. These are key concepts showing what Munshi conceives as the Indian nation and the role the different sectors have in it. The task is meaningful since analyzing Munshi's thought enables us to delve into a particular chapter of the Hindu trajectory in the evolution of a national identity which since the end of the nineteenth century, but more emphatically in the 1920s, was being gradually defined in terms of exclusion, putting aside sectors of society who were considered to be outside the Hindu mainstream.

On the other hand, referring to Munshi's ideological formations will make it possible to appreciate the intermingling of two kinds of nationalism. As some scholars have noticed and as has been referred to in the introductory chapter, nationalism in the Indian context has a twofold tendency, the anti-colonial and the religious nationalisms.<sup>3</sup> Basically, the first one focuses on the freedom struggle against the colonial government and the latter is more concerned to develop a cultural representation of an identity with Hindu background, which aims at being an 'umbrella' construct incorporating all of the different socio-cultural sectors but contrasting it with the figure of a threatening 'other'.

Examining the case of K.M. Munshi allows us to reflect on how these two categories are related to one another and about the place of a key notion such as secularism in this question. The first binomial, anti-colonial *versus* religious nationalism, poses the secular matter in a more direct way. Does it mean that anti-colonial nationalism, contrary to its religious trend, is secular? Not necessarily, for instance, when analyzing the nationalist struggle in Bardoli, which is delimited by the anti-colonial trend, Ghanshyam Shah notices

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<sup>3</sup> See Romila Thapar, *Somanatha*, and G. Aloysius, *Nationalism without a Nation in India*, pp. 134-135.

how leaders mobilized people along religious lines,<sup>4</sup> Vallabhbhai Patel included. There was an evidently religious dimension in Mehta, another leader in Bardoli, and Patel's discourses, revealing how these leaders imprinted a dose of religiosity in the nationalist campaigns against the British administration. Hence anti-colonialism and religiosity are not terms which exclude each other.

The second typology, cultural and political nationalism cannot be looked at either in contrasting terms of religious, being the cultural, and secular, being the political. Once again the previous example is helpful in illustrating how the Bardoli satyagraha—which in the light of this categorization can be considered as political nationalism—has this religious facet we referred to. Then, religious nationalism is equivalent to cultural nationalism, for both adopt Hinduism as the cultural referent in the articulation of a national identity, whereas anti-colonial and political nationalism do not exactly coalesce. While the latter is associated with subaltern groups attempting to a wider participation in the public domain, the anti-colonial is not exclusive of marginalized groups. But, both the political and the anti-colonial nationalism may have, though not as a rule, a feature of religiosity.

Thus, in a sense, these categories are not perfectly delineated and in many cases they overlap and more than that, within each there may have been diverse expressions and nuances. However, attending to them as ideal-type constructions helps better to delineate Munshi's nationalist principles.

Munshi, to some extent, is concerned by the freedom struggle and has a participation in social mobilizations but, beyond his activism, as we will be able to see later, he is also quite active in the production of all kind of works from essays through histories and novels that promote his cultural representations of Hindu/Indian identity, not

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<sup>4</sup> See Ghanshyam Shah, 'Traditional Society', pp. 89-107.

necessarily in secular terms. Therefore, perhaps it is religious nationalism or cultural nationalism that really frames Munshi's thought. His compromise with nationalism in its anti-colonial dimension was not so firm since 'loyalty to the Government, irrespective of the religious beliefs of the rulers, had become an inviolable custom in the Munshi family'<sup>5</sup>. However, regardless of the family's attachment to government, Munshi's belief in the 'doctrine of gradualness' concerning India's independence has been pointed out by his biographers and moreover, it has been noted that 'his knowledge of history persuaded him about the positive aspects of the British Raj'<sup>6</sup> His conviction of remaining loyal to the British is also alluded to in several of his writings, where he seems to advocate 'an unholy alliance' with the British. However, he condemns such an alliance when established by Muslims. Thus he states that while the Second World War is taking place, 'I am not excited by 'Independence'; and have seen danger in exciting others about it. And see no disgrace in accepting help from a foreign Power in order to protect India's nationalism and unity—that Power may be Britain today, and who knows which other Power after the War! What is China doing? Is not Russia taking foreign help? Is not England doing it?'<sup>7</sup> In this sense, Munshi's nationalism is rather distant from the anti-colonial type and his loyalty to colonial government was a reflection of the supportive attitude of important sectors of Indian society or politicians such as several members of the Congress party that assumed a rather temperate attitude regarding independence from Britain in its initial phase.

In addition, it must be mentioned that it is not always entirely understandable what the boundaries of Munshi's idea of Indian identity are. Besides the fact that identities are not fixed but constantly re-elaborated, there is also the fact that Munshi is a figure difficult

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<sup>5</sup> V.B. Kulkarni, *K.M. Munshi*, (New Delhi, 1983), p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> K.M. Munshi, *Indian Constitutional Documents*, (2 vols, Bombay, 1967), p. 424.

to grasp. His is a complex personality that undergoes a pronounced transformation through different stages of his life. He can be seen as an ardent nationalist student; as a non-orthodox Brahman marrying a widow; as a successful lawyer quite law-oriented and skeptical of Gandhian methods, later, as an adept to Gandhi and participating vigorously in *satyagraha* campaigns and sharing jail because of this participation; as a prolific Gujarati writer; as a tough Home Minister and agent general in Hyderabad; as a proud Gujarati intending to highlight what he considers to be the regional greatness of his state and also as a Hindu nationalist with extreme views on Hindu nationhood.

In this context, some scholars have particularly referred to Munshi as a communalist or as a “Hindu nationalist” and have provided a good amount of evidence for this. Manu Bhagavan refers in an illuminating essay that Munshi must be seen in the context of a ‘transgressive ecumene’, that is, a debate about men in decision making position that profited from it to impose their beliefs to the masses. The Gujarati writer, according to Bhagavan, is one of these men whose ideology was ‘a dressed-up version of Hindutva’. This is partially true since Munshi did try to spread a Hindu cultural ideology. Thus his cultural nationalism is undeniable, but it must be underscored that his stance towards Muslims is not homogeneously antagonist. Then, even though Bhagavan touches some aspects of Munshi’s intermittent temperate attitude he does not analyze them in detail.<sup>8</sup> Munshi’s stance towards Muslims is not always clear and in several of his writings there is a suggestion in the belief of a past peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Hindus<sup>9</sup> or even a self-controlled attitude at describing some Muslim raids in the Gujarati region. Thus, beyond brands, a central point for this chapter will be the clarification of Munshi’s

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<sup>8</sup> See ‘The Hindutva Underground’, pp. 39-48.

<sup>9</sup> Munshi, *Akhand Hindustan*, pp. 18-20.



changing considerations of a Hindu/Indian identity contrasted to an elusive depiction of Muslim identity. The idea is searching for a coherent explanation for his inconsistencies and elucidating when his thought and discourse transform into a recalcitrant form of Hinduism.

This is not to deny the perspective of Munshi as a Hindu nationalist, but to the extent he is considered specifically through that lens then the tensions and contradictions in his thought are omitted. Related to this, it is interesting the way Munshi is remembered by one of the ministers of justice he met, Mr. Kincaid, who noted 'I remember especially my agreeable relations with Mr. Munshi, a Gujarati Advocate. Since then he has, unfortunately, become an extremist'.<sup>10</sup> What this point of view suggests is a perceptible transformation in Munshi's personality, an aspect which would explain his several inconsistencies in the considerations of Muslims and Hindus.

On the other hand, if we are to establish a spectrum of communal intolerance, Munshi does not achieve the degrees reached by figures like Gowalkar and Savarkar. It is true that in many cases, Munshi's concession for Muslims is looking at them as a minority with their own rights, which is something *Hindutva* leaders as Gowalkar decline.<sup>11</sup> But besides this consideration of Muslims as a religious minority there is also what seems to be an attempt in several of his writings to include Muslims in the Indian nation by alluding to a past unity. In this sense, he identifies the British as the promoters of division between Hindus and Muslims,<sup>12</sup> and this criticism of colonialism, according to Ranajit Guha, was a missing element for the crystallization of a truly autonomous Indian historiography in the

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<sup>10</sup> J. H. Dave *et al* (eds), *Munshi: His Art and Work*, (4 vols, Bombay, no specific date given), 1, p. 161.

<sup>11</sup> Gowalkar declares that cultural manifestations of minorities must be subsumed in the cultural mainstream and if this minoritarian groups decide not to leave their cultural background then they can just be considered as aliens to Indian nation. See Chetan Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism. Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths*, p. 129.

<sup>12</sup> Munshi, *Akhand Hindustan*, p. 93.

nineteenth century<sup>13</sup>, that is to say, that to some extent, and perhaps in an intermittent fashion, Munshi would have declined accepting one of the main premises of colonialism which is the idea of a perennial confrontation between Hindus and Muslims.

This way, without being in complete agreement with Jaffrelot who sees Munshi merely as a traditionalist,<sup>14</sup> the Gujarati writer can be described as a reactionary and his stance becomes harder through time up to the point of being considered as a communalist from several points of view. We will elucidate such a transformation following the circumstances in which this experience takes place.

But before referring to his line of thought in detail it is worth to set out a brief reconstruction of Munshi's life and the formation of his thinking. By noticing his personal aspects we will be able to look at him in a broader perspective and to calibrate his contribution in the evolution of Hindu nationalism in Gujarat and in India as a whole.

### Life sketches

One of the problems of Munshi's biography is the lack of a serious scholarly account of his life. This makes it necessary to articulate a biographical sketch of the author. A collection of commemorative books celebrating his seventieth birthday provide much material on his life. However, for obvious reasons, this material is not academic and analytical; its purpose is to pay homage to K.M. Munshi. They are written in a laudatory manner and with an unavoidable partiality. Nonetheless, they present some useful biographical information about him.

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<sup>13</sup> Ranajit Guha, *An Indian historiography of India: a nineteenth-century agenda and its implications*, (Calcutta, 1988), p. 50.

<sup>14</sup> Jaffrelot cited in Manu Bhagavan, 'The Hindutva Underground', p. 40.

Kanhaiyalal Maneklal Munshi was born in Bharuch, Gujarat on December 30, 1887 within an orthodox Brahman family; that is why ‘Munshi’s life and temperament present the typical life of the century: high Brahmanical pride in India’s past’.<sup>15</sup> Some authors have pointed out that Munshi himself declared having a lineage from an ancient Brahmin family which goes back to the Delhi sultanate in which one of the Munshis was in service of Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlug whose rule began in 1325.<sup>16</sup> This brahmanical background was later revealed in such works as *Jaya Somanath* where the author brought together ‘Munshi’s brahmanhood, family heritage, worship of Shiva, literary activity, and understanding of nationalism.’<sup>17</sup>

As a youth, Munshi was attracted towards other religious creeds besides Hinduism. Thus, he felt an appeal to Christianity since as some of his biographers have noticed ‘he was greatly impressed by the teachings of Jesus’,<sup>18</sup> but by reading more on Christianity he just found that the idea of the trinity was nonsense. In this context, it is expressed that ‘this shows the peculiarity in Munshi’s character, namely his capacity to change from one extreme view to another with all sincerity and seriousness’.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps it is this same inconsistency which we are going to find later in his standpoint towards Muslims.

By contrast, quite early in his life he became an admirer of Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883), the founder of the Arya Samaj. Studying in Baroda College Munshi was close to the centre of the Arya Samaj’s activities in Gujarat and in 1906 he wrote an article on Saraswati where he stated

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<sup>15</sup> Dave, (ed.), *Munshi: His Art*, 1, p. xvii.

<sup>16</sup> Kulkarni, *K.M. Munshi*, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> G. Shah, ‘Kanaiyalal Munshi on Gujarati and Indian Nationalism’ cited in Thapar, *Somanatha*, p. 183.

<sup>18</sup> Dave, (ed.), *Munshi: His Art*, 2, p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 1, p. 24.

He gave us the first programme of cultural reintegration, most of which has now been associated with Nationalism; removal of caste distinction and untouchability, and equality of women; the highest scientific education essentially Indian; the use of Hindi as national language and the pursuit of Sanskrit as a predominant national influence; repudiation of Westernism; re-organisation of life on the basis of freedom as in Vedic times and a sturdy resistance to foreign rule and alien culture.<sup>20</sup>

From this early time his Hindu cultural background is perceptible in his thinking. Besides his admiration for Saraswati, Aurobindo Ghosh can also be mentioned as a paradigmatic figure that he met while studying in Baroda College. He was very receptive to Aurobindo's speeches and writings<sup>21</sup>. Moreover, according to one of his biographers<sup>22</sup>, Shivaji was also a hero to Munshi which is particularly revealing since nineteenth century Gujarati writers oscillated between condemning him for his raiding in Gujarat but also considering him as 'the Protector of Cow and Brahman'.<sup>23</sup> This point seems to suggest that Munshi was inclined to think of Shivaji in the same way he had begun to be perceived in a national sense, that is, as the heroic warrior that fought and challenged the Muslim Aurangzeb, in contrast to the regional depiction that, at the end of the nineteenth century, still preserved the memory of Shivaji's plunder of Surat. Early in his life Munshi had already come to see the Maratha warrior as such a national hero, fighting Muslim domination.

Thus, all these influences must have contributed in the shaping of Munshi's worldview, one which reflects a close appeal to an Indian nationalism but following a sort of progressive attitude as revealed in his list of the 'duties of an Indian patriot' such as 'women—equality of education; abolition of infant marriage... religious liberty... the

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<sup>20</sup> Munshi cited in Dave, (ed.), *Munshi: His Art*, 2, p. 10.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>22</sup> Kulkarni, *K. M. Munshi*, p. 9.

<sup>23</sup> Nineteenth-century writers began to perceive a difference between Shivaji's status at a local or regional level and at a national level. There was some resentment in regional considerations of Shivaji because of his raiding in Gujarat, but at a national dimension he gradually reached a heroic status. For a broader elaboration of Shivaji's symbolism see Riho Isaka, 'Gujarati Intellectuals and History Writing in the Colonial Period', p. 4869.

brotherhood of Indians... freedom of speech and writing... universal free education...'<sup>24</sup>.

This list was written by a very young Munshi, and he did not remain loyal to it completely, sometimes he became more conservative, sometimes less orthodox, then from his different changes in mind it can be said that Munshi fluctuated among diverse 'convictions' not always very well defined.

Another episode of his life worthwhile referring to is the loss of his father at the age of fifteen. Beyond the emotive meaning of the fact itself, what is particularly interesting is the relevance a Muslim seems to acquire in his life: 'Muhammad Shafi was a pious Muslim, who read his *Qoran* and scrupulously followed the injunctions of his religion... Yet it was this orthodox follower of Islam who not only supervised all the affairs of a Brahmin family, but even kept a sharp eye on the priest to see that he performed the daily *puja* properly'.<sup>25</sup> The essence of referring the episode lies in the fact of presenting a more complete picture of the different traditions and customs which, in one way or another, were present in Munshi's life and formation.

One of the most overwhelming forces which influenced Munshi's thought and also some of his actions was Gandhi, in spite of his later disconnection from him and the Congress because of Munshi's twist from the Gandhian *ahimsa* stance. His first impressions of Gandhi are not quite encouraging since for him 'his principles appeared unconvincing, and his methods reactionary'.<sup>26</sup> At this time Munshi worked as a lawyer who was not convinced by Gandhi's activism. According to him, Bardoli made the difference in his considerations of Gandhi and the struggle peasants were pursuing after witnessing with his own eyes the current situation. He joined Gandhian campaigns at the end of the 20's,

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<sup>24</sup> Munshi cited in Dave, (ed.), *Munshi: His Art*, 1, p. 36.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>26</sup> Munshi, *I Follow the Mahatma*, cited in *ibid.*, 2, p. 20.

and during the salt march of 1930 wrote that ‘every day of his (Gandhi’s) march brought me tense excitement and insufferable agony. I felt like a thrice-cursed slave tied to a millstone of luxurious living, destined to grind and to grind for ever. Why was I not in my country’s service?’<sup>27</sup> His active participation in some of the campaigns was followed by several periods in jail. What is interesting to notice here is Munshi’s considerations on Gandhi since they reflect his persistently oscillating attitude in the way he perceives people and facts. Thus, the point to be highlighted is Munshi’s changing perception which would throw light in the understanding of his several contradictory thoughts.

In addition to his activism, Munshi also worked as a Home minister in Bombay (1937) and agent general in Hyderabad (1947) where he had the opportunity of displaying his authoritarianism, in the first case justifying the open firing by the police on a group of communist demonstrators with an argument of self-defense<sup>28</sup> and also in a supposed fight against alcoholism. With this objective in mind, he established prohibition in the city of Bombay in 1939, at a time when the liquor trade was in charge of Parsis.

Related to the this point, Riho Isaka has noted how in late nineteenth century a sector of intellectual Gujarati elites in an attempt to construct a regional identity marginalized languages which were not considered as real Gujarati. This was the case for Muslim Gujarati and Parsi Gujarati, this last being considered by Hindu literati to be tainted by the use of several words of foreign origin mainly from Persian, Arabic and English.<sup>29</sup> This sector, in turn, dominated important positions in several sectors: business, government, journalism. ‘Thus their social and cultural influence could hardly be

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 74-75.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>29</sup> Riho Isaka, ‘Gujarati Elites and the Construction of a Regional Identity’, p. 155.

ignored’<sup>30</sup>. Perhaps Munshi’s prohibition in Bombay can be seen as a measure interpreted as an effort for undermining Parsis’ economical resources which could be translated as the continuity of the open endeavor of marginalizing, in one way or another, a prosperous community like the Parsis lacking a Hindu background according to Gujarati literati.

An additional factor to examine this episode is in connection to Munshi’s Hindu background. If Munshi is said to have an ancient Brahmanical lineage it is possible that his brahmanhood would be supporting the prohibition implementation. That is to say, that to some extent the prohibition can be considered an attempt at ‘sanskritization’, a notion not used here in its restrictive sense as a process whereby low caste groups strive to go up in the social hierarchy by adopting ‘pure’ customs and habits and by sending to oblivion the supposedly polluting ones. I mean sanskritization in a wider sense which implies ‘mounting a political challenge to the dominance of the higher communities.’<sup>31</sup> Thus, the prohibition implemented by Munshi would be aimed at the obliteration of non brahmanical practices but also at challenging and, in fact, undermining the economic power of the Parsi sector.

On the other hand, by seeing Munshi both in administrative posts and participating in protests, it is clear that he knew how to play a part both in government and opposition. That is why his protest was channeled, on several occasions, within constitutional boundaries, for instance, when he wrote a letter to Governor Sir Leslie Wilson with a petition for a second inquiry carried out independently, regarding the repressive acts in Bardoli. His was a ‘protesting’ letter absolutely attached to constitutionalism to such an

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>31</sup> For a detailed discussion on sanskritization and its problematization see David Hardiman, *The Coming of the Devi. Adivasi Assertion in Western India*, (Delhi: 1995), pp. 157-160.

extent that he referred to *satyagraha* campaigning as a non-constitutional protest. Gandhi himself replied to this constitutionalist stance in *Young India*.<sup>32</sup>

Another important point to be observed is that while having a governmental position, Munshi revealed a strongly authoritarian streak which was manifested in the way he used public force to put an end to civil protest. While in political charge, he widely shared the attitude of British government which refused to accept the legitimacy of a method like *ahimsa* or a pacific revolution, since the only legitimate strategy for them was the pacific constitutional channel.<sup>33</sup> Munshi seems to see things in the same line. Thus whenever there is a protest his first alternative to cope with it is the use of force, which is a sort of paradox given his own participation in demonstrations and his subsequent imprisonments because of this.

As for his position as agent general in Hyderabad in 1947, Manu Bhagavan underlines Munshi's willingness 'to be more directly involved in ground tactics advocated by the Hindu right'.<sup>34</sup> Again in this charge, the Gujarati agent does not hesitate in making use of the police action in order that the government of India gained control of the Nizam's territory. The argument of the defense of the civil population is again present in this decision. Thus, by the previous episodes it is clear that authoritarianism is a relevant element shaping Munshi's personality and this will be even clearer while declaring as a witness for the Bombay riots of 1929 where he showed an openly aggressive stance against Muslims.

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<sup>32</sup> 'It is too late in the day to call *Satyagraha* unconstitutional. It will be unconstitutional when Truth and its fellow, Self-sacrifice, become unlawful'. For the whole reply see Munshi, *I Follow the Mahatma*, (Bombay and Calcutta: 1940), p. 25.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>34</sup> Bhagavan, 'The Hindutva Underground', p. 46.



Another controversial activity developed by Munshi was the foundation of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in 1938, which was supposed to be an institution dedicated to spread Indian culture, but one delineated within a Hindu dimension putting aside other cultural expressions. A precedent of this activity had been the organization of the Panchgani Educational Society in 1924 that followed the structuring of Christian missionary schools with the aim of encouraging 'Indian' culture and values. With this in mind, Munshi drafted an oath for its every day reciting: 'As a pupil... I pledge myself to fulfill its ideals, it is the aim of my life to serve Gujarat, India, and the Aryan culture. I will constantly strive to achieve the highest ideals of Gujarat. If need be, I shall sacrifice my all for the glory and greatness of India. In order that the *Arya sanskriti* may remain pure and inviolate, I will incessantly strive to study and to preserve it.'<sup>35</sup>

His pledge clearly configures Indian culture and Gujarati culture, that is, national and regional representations, within an Aryan framework meaning a Hindu one which leaves neither a point of identification to groups outside this mainstream, nor an intention to incorporate those groups. And this line is precisely retaken in the foundation of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan whose main purpose is said to be 'to teach the younger generation to appreciate and live up to the permanent values of Bharatiya Vidya which is flowing from the supreme art of creative life-energy as represented by Shri Ramachandra, Shri Krishna, Vyasa, Buddha and Mahavira... Shri Ramakrishna, Paramahansa, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, and Swami Vivekananda, Shri Aurobindo and Mahatma Gandhi.'<sup>36</sup> As it has been pointed out in other places,<sup>37</sup> Munshi decides to assimilate both Buddha and Mahavira

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<sup>35</sup> Munshi cited in Jayana Sheth, *Munshi: Self-Sculptor*, (Bombay, 1979), p. 19.

<sup>36</sup> K.M. Munshi, *Jaya Somanath*, (Bombay, 1976), opening pages.

<sup>37</sup> Bhagavan, 'The Hindutva Underground', p. 44.

within the Hindu fold, but other expressions such as Islam and Christianity having a strong presence in the subcontinent are deliberately omitted.

Among his most controversial activities was his campaigning for the reconstruction of the temple of Somnath in 1951. In 1922 the writer visited Somnath and it seems that from that early year he began considering the possibility of the reconstruction of the temple; an agenda which, through time, became paradigmatic for other nationalistic campaigns of the Hindu right in contemporary India.

His other positions in government were as Minister of Agriculture and Food (1950) and as governor of Uttar Pradesh (1952-1957). By contrast and among his several interests Munshi also dedicated himself to literature and achieved a vast production of written works, a diverse *corpus* which consists of historical novels, essays, speeches and other works. He wrote prolifically both in Gujarati and English and his works were widely influential being a conscious effort by the writer to spread his ideas assuming himself as a member of what he considered to be a 'dominant minority' whose role and social responsibility, as we will see lines ahead, was shaping the rest of the society members.

Thus, as we can see from his multi-faceted trajectory, Munshi covers a diversity of activities and in the course of their development many of them became controversial. Although there is an undeniable evidence to brand him as a Hindu nationalist, it is worth remembering that Hindu nationalism took many forms. Munshi can be considered as an exponent of 'soft Hindutva', in David Hardiman's words or as a fluctuating extreme Hindu right nationalist. At times, he made open allusions to a past unity between Muslims and Hindus, but then contradicted himself in other speeches and also, in nationalist activities led by him. Following sections will analyze the interplay of his contradictory assumptions in the light of Munshi's notion of history and his attitude toward Muslims, constructions

which will be helpful in elucidating the kind of nationalism the Gujarati writer advocates, one which, as referred above, seems to be inserted within the cultural or religious nationalist trend by supporting the idea of Hindu superiority in all the possible dimensions of life.

### Muslim images and fluctuating discourses

In analyzing Munshi's ideology, there are two main aspects to take into consideration. First, there is his fluctuating attitude towards Muslims; and second a distinction between his discursive and his practical nationalism. In general, Munshi was not a consistent thinker. A good illustration of this is the following indication of his perception of the West since 'if he was fascinated by the organizational strength of the Western educational and political institutions, he was not deterred from vigorously denouncing Westernism, a slavish imitation of the West. Again, while denouncing self-enervating Indian traditions, the revival of ancient Indian thoughts attracted Munshi... contradictory forces manifested in Munshi's life and works.'<sup>38</sup> This attitude is indubitably a distinctive element of the Gujarati writer and if there is a ground where this element is persistently manifested is in his views on Muslims. It is in this respect where it is possible to find a quite clear inconsistency, which goes sometimes from a moderate attitude toward Muslims, through an antagonist stance against them and in other occasions, it seems that Munshi's exacerbated nationalism is rooted rather in a regional and national cultural pride than in an animadversion against Muslims.

Munshi does not necessarily see Muslims pejoratively in a metonymical way, that is, that he does not take the part for the whole in referring to Muslims, and most of the time

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<sup>38</sup> Sheth, *Munshi: Self-Sculptor*, p. xiv.

when he displays negative expressions or sentiments about Muslims they are aimed at a particular sector of that community, whether it be the ruling sultans of Gujarat or the separatist group advocating the idea of Pakistan. For instance, Munshi states that: ‘The ambition of the Disruptionists to have a Muslim majority or even an equality in the Government of India is actuated by a desire to reduce the Hindu majority to the position of a minority.’<sup>39</sup> In this case the ‘disruptionists’ are specifically the Muslims who advocate either the idea of an equal representation in central government or the idea of Pakistan. And although he states that ‘[t]he Muslims in the bulk will never seek the partition of India [since] [w]herever they are, they are the sons of the common motherland, India, not of any part of it’<sup>40</sup> ... Munshi also expresses that ‘[i]t is a mistake to imagine that Pakistan has been a cry only restricted to the Disruptionists. It has gone down to the Muslim masses as an anti-Hindu war cry.’<sup>41</sup> In this last expression, even though he seems to identify the ‘problematic’ group within the Muslim community, he seems to consider the whole of the community as a possible threat because of the influential aspect of their leaders who can manipulate them easily.

However and as we will see later in detail, though Munshi’s historical perspective of Muslim rulers is not, in general terms, positively assessed he is also able to state that ‘[u]nder the Moguls, Gujarāt regained its prosperity. Cambay was the most flourishing port in India... European travellers [*sic*] and Indian historians vie with one another in extolling the magnificence of Ahmedābād with its three hundred and eighty suburbs...’<sup>42</sup> Thus, if the Muslims of the present are a group of troublemakers, other Muslims from the past left a

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<sup>39</sup> Munshi, *Akhand Hindustan*, p. 40.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>42</sup> Munshi, *Gujarāt and its literature. From Early Times to 1852*, p. 225.

progressive heritage to Gujarat and deserve to be constructively evaluated. In this context, Munshi's view of Muslim community or a sector of it, varies, paraphrasing Datta, from degrees of recalcitrance to harmonious perceptions.

The third aspect to take in consideration is that there are two dimensions in exploring Munshi's nationalism. On the one hand, it is his nationalism in a discursive sphere. We will explore it through his writings, essays, speeches and histories. It is this discursive nationalism that projects a not completely intolerant idea of Muslims. It is here where a certain feature of moderation or understanding can be traced. But on the other hand, there is the dimension of his nationalist activities, like his association in the management of *akhadas* or gymnastic organizations for physical culture, 'an essential machinery for training our race in the art of self-defence'<sup>43</sup>, his very authoritarianism while holding government positions or his campaigning for the reconstruction of the temple of Somanatha. All these activities can be seen in a more belligerent line which, at the end, undermines any feature of tolerance his discursive nationalism could display. Therefore, paying attention to the aspects mentioned above, and particularly the two spheres of Munshi's nationalist stance, we need to study the author's ideology in a broader and more comprehensive perspective.

In scrutinizing the writer, we must underline the premise that K.M. Munshi is a figure of his time, that is to say, an intellectual inserted within his historical context. This is discernible in the shared prevailing feeling toward the glorification of the past.<sup>44</sup> The

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<sup>43</sup> Munshi, *Akhand Hindustan*, p. 262.

<sup>44</sup> Within colonial discourse there was this attitude of glorifying Indian ancient civilization, for instance, on the part of the orientalist such as William Jones. He particularly emphasized the philosophical and literary achievements of Indian past, a notion contrasting with James Mill's condemnation of the supposed despotism and immorality of the Indian civilization. The idea of a Hindu glorious past was adopted and re-elaborated by Hindu intellectuals at the end of the nineteenth century and during the twentieth century. For an elaboration of this idea see Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, pp. 99-100.

Gujarati writer, as many others in his time, believed in a glorious Hindu past which was obliterated by the incursion of the *mlechchhas* or invaders. Again, he is not always consistent in this respect. For instance when referring to what he calls the ‘fifth period’ in Indian history, an ‘age of cultural stagnation, (650 A.D.—1175 A.D.)’, he mentions that ‘[t]his age saw the invasions of Mahmud of Ghazni, which provides a glorious record of Indian resistance. In spite of a short-lived occupation of a part of the North-West by foreigners, the country on the whole remained undisturbed by them.’<sup>45</sup> In this specific case, Mahmud of Ghazni’s incursion in India seemed to have been relatively harmless, evidently thanks to ‘Indian resistance’.

In addition, Mahmud’s presence in India is not seen by Munshi in a religious language at all, since ‘Mahmud, no doubt, looted temples and broke idols... but iconoclastic zeal was not his principal motive as suggested by Muslim chroniclers; it was conquest... he was not a fanatic and not anti-Hindu’.<sup>46</sup> This depiction is particularly relevant since several of the Hindu nationalist writers of the time have looked at Muslim incursions in terms of religious fanaticism and some of them, without establishing nuances among the different Muslim rules, that is to say, Muslims were Muslims and there was no distinction. On the contrary, the portrait of Mahmud Munshi offered to his readers contrasts widely with the one delineated by the colonial translators of the Persian chronicle, *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, the Supplement of the *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* or regional accounts such as Forbes’ *Ras Mala* where the Turk was definitely depicted as a bigot and a tyrant to Hindu believers. As seen in chapter one, the Somnath episode was particularly shaped in a dimension of a religious war between Hinduism and Islam.

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<sup>45</sup> Munshi, *Akhand Hindustan*, p. 127.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

As Thapar has particularly noticed, Mahmud's invasions, by the mid-nineteenth century, were considered in the light of two theories. One advocated the idea of Mahmud's iconoclasm and the idea of a conflict between Islam and Hinduism, and the other dealt with the subordination of religious matters to conquest and loot.<sup>47</sup> The twentieth century witnessed the first theory gaining ground not only on the part of British administrators and scholars—who, at the end, saw the raid on Somanatha as the incipient antagonism between Hindus and Muslims religiously speaking—but also on the part of Hindu nationalists and politicians who adopted Somanatha as a symbol of Hindu oppression at the hands of the Muslims.

On the contrary, Munshi, if transiently, is able to see that the raiding of Somanatha had been exaggerated in a certain way, since the sources which narrated the event were aimed at praising the Turk and his deeds. Hence, to explain Somanatha's plunder, Munshi compared the incident to Napoleon's retreat from Moscow, '[b]oth were ambitious raids; both ended in disaster... But in describing the march to Moscow the Russian historians would not take the French point of view. In India, however, Indian historians write from the point of view of the admirers of the invader.'<sup>48</sup>

That is why Munshi's posture in the case of Mahmud is worth noticing. Because, at least, in this depiction, he was not attached to the common standpoint of perceiving Mahmud's raiding in a mere religious light and he questioned the sources on the event because of their sycophantic purpose regarding Mahmud just like the nineteenth century writers such as James Bird and Alexander Forbes had questioned the objectivity of some sources. However, this stance does not remain unaltered through his writings, since some of

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<sup>47</sup> Thapar, *Somanatha*, pp. 181-182.

<sup>48</sup> Munshi, *Akhand Hindustan*, pp. 136-137.

Munshi's fictional works would develop a point of view supporting the idea of Muslims as fanatic temple-desecrators. Nevertheless, this opinion is expressed through the mediation of a narrator which brings other implications in the analysis. That is why there will be a later chapter that focuses on this topic.

But, consistent with his inconsistency, the writer's moderation is not sustained. His views on Mahmud fluctuate from work to work. In *Somanatha. The Shrine Eternal*, Mahmud –the 'imbecile travesty of imperial greatness'— is portrayed in a contrasting fashion to that in *Akhand Hindustan*. As it has been referred, whereas in *Akhand Hindustan* India does not seem to have been deeply affected by the Turk's invasion, in *The Shrine Eternal*, even the chapters' titles are quite suggestive in the kind of character we are going to find in this subsequent Mahmud. In this sense, for instance, 'Rise of a Destroyer' shows a negative figure of the Turk whose dynamics of action in plundering and desecrating shrines and temples was maintained to such extent that even when he had to withdraw he did it 'plundering all along his retreat'.<sup>49</sup>

The culminating episode of his plundering is obviously the one against the temple of Somanatha. Thus, Munshi recreates the episode:

...Fifty thousand Indian warriors laid down their lives in defence of their beloved shrine. Mahmud captured the fort, entered the temple sanctified by centuries of devotion, broke the *Linga* to pieces, looted the temple and burnt it to the ground.

The Third Temple of beautiful thin-grained red sand stone was thus destroyed. I saw the steps of the temple, the base of the pillars burnt and the debris of its south wall sloping seaward imbedded in the earth.

A sacred city like that of Somanatha armoured principally by the devotion and reverence of the whole country, fell a prey to an army pledged to fanatic destruction of alien shrines.<sup>50</sup>

To elucidate these changes, it is necessary to consider the moment of publication of the different works. In other words, it is essential to reflect on the context of enunciation of his

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<sup>49</sup> K.M. Munshi, *Somanatha, The Shrine Eternal*, (4th edn, Bombay, 1976), p. 36.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39-40.



discourses. *Akhand Hindustan* was published in 1942 and *Somanatha, The Shrine Eternal* was first published in 1951, the year when Somnath temple was inaugurated after an initiative proposed by Vallabhbhai Patel around 1947 and the successful campaign orchestrated by K.M. Munshi. The early forties is an important period since protests against the British continued to be articulated, and the Quit India movement (1942) is an illustration of this. At the same time, Munshi had left the Congress because of his departure from the *ahimsa* stance. In epistolary communication, Gandhi and Munshi expressed their point of view regarding the methods to be followed during the independence struggle. Gandhi made public his position that those who could not advocate *ahimsa* entirely should leave the Congress. Munshi believed that this alluded to him, and in a letter to Gandhi explained his ideas on the necessity to be physically prepared for the struggle and justified his link to akhadas or physical training centers.<sup>51</sup> He left the Congress.

Thus, 1942 is a year in which Munshi carries out freely his *Akhand Hindustan* campaign which appeals, at least in rhetoric, to a united India both with Hindus and Muslims. In this sense, this more temperate attitude toward Muslim past conquests could be seen as an attempt for alluding to a past integration of both communities even in the middle of certain episodes of confrontations. This would have had the purpose of underlining the necessity of establishing a common front with the communities in order to eradicate the increasing demand for Pakistan. Obviously not in an uninterested way, he wants Muslims to forget about their ideas of a nation for their own and to stay within the Indian nation, an imagined nation conceived as essentially Hindu by Munshi, even if recognizing their rights as a Muslim minority. That is why *Akhand Hindustan*, which contains several speeches and

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<sup>51</sup> Munshi explained his disagreement with a non-violent policy, that it was something unknown both for him and the government. *I follow the Mahatma*, p. 15.

articles by Munshi from 1938, makes constant allusions to a past peaceful coexistence of both communities.

However, Munshi does this with an ambivalent discourse because if, on the one hand, he states that ‘religious antagonism did play a part; but in the end an adjustment had been brought about which recognized and accepted the differences in religious rituals and respected them’<sup>52</sup>; on the other, he justifies a kind of defensive attitude of his Hinduness against Muslims, since ‘if a Muslim frowned we would be prepared to give up our language, our dress, our culture. We are afraid of not being accepted as nationalists if we stuck to things which make us what we are.’<sup>53</sup> This way, there is tacit depiction of Muslims as a threat, since because of their insistently alluded ‘susceptibilities’ –which can be read as an euphemism for their ‘intolerance’— Hindu people are not allowed to display their cultural expressions freely. Therefore, Munshi expressed his wish for a joint coexistence, but he made clear that ‘I want to live in peace and harmony with non-Hindus in India; to gain national freedom for all, by the efforts of all. But I refuse to be apologetic of my race, religion or culture.’<sup>54</sup> This twofold discourse then, is a relevant aspect for questioning the temperance and tolerance he showed in some writings or speeches. Instead we can make reference to a ‘manipulating’ aspect depending on the circumstances, to achieve particular goals on the part of the Gujarati writer who, under this light, could be depicted as a ‘transgressive ecumene’ referred to men in decision making positions that profited from it to impose their beliefs to the masses and compelled them to act accordingly.<sup>55</sup> In this sense it is interesting to note the way he is looked at because of the development of his

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<sup>52</sup> Munshi, *Akhand Hindustan*, p. 97.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>55</sup> Manu Bhagavan, ‘The Hindutva Underground’, p. 38-49.

campaigning. In some Muslim sectors, for example, he was considered in the same terms as Savarkar, as a communalist or as a Mahasabhaite.

Even if it is true that Munshi does not have the same stance as Savarkar, he was sympathetic towards certain communal bodies, like the Rashtriya Sayamsevak Sangh (RSS) that invited Munshi to preside over the “Gurupornima” celebrations and to a parade of the RSS in Poona, in August 4<sup>th</sup> 1941.

To the Hindu youth my only appeal is that he should shed fear. We are thirty crores. We have strength, resources, ability, organization. We have a proud heritage, history, culture. No one, however powerful, can keep or reduce us to serfdom, unless we ourselves want to remain or become serfs. Others try to over-awe us, for, we are willing to be over-awed. Get rid of the fear complex, I beseech you. Build your cities on the Vesuvius. Plant your feet firmly. Let your head touch the sky. For, India has a message for the weary war-ridden world. India cannot die for, you will save it.<sup>56</sup>

In this speech he not only incited the youth, but also elaborated the idea that a majority that should have domination over the minority groups. There is also the representation of a Hindu population victimized and converted into ‘serfs’ at the hands of powerful opponents. Here Munshi adheres to the essentialization of Hindus and Muslims in terms of emasculation and virility, where Hindus are supposed to have a characteristic feature of effeminacy and Muslims of hypermasculinity.

On its part, *The Shrine Eternal* published in 1951 has also as a context a quite effervescent period. Although India is already in a post-Partition era, there had been adjustments which had produced huge controversy. In this period, there are considerations for the linguistic reorganization of some Indian states, between 1948 and 1950 there seems to be a possibility to carry out such reorganization since a new constitution was being

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<sup>56</sup> ‘Shed Fear & Grow Strong’ in *Maharatta* (Poona), 8<sup>th</sup> August 1941. HDSB, file no. 1046-B, 1941-1942, p. 53. MSA (B).

forged.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, if it is true that some years later the protests were going to increase and a broad linguistic restructuring was going to take place around 1956, from the mid-century there were already heated discussions on the topic. Thus, this atmosphere of regional linguistic reorganization was a fertile ground to reflect on regional identities.

Munshi's work on Somanatha must be looked at within this reflexive process. Then, his campaigning for the reconstruction of Somanatha can be read as an assertion of Gujarati identity. In this sense, the shrine was symbolic to the writer as a glory of Gurjara-desh.<sup>58</sup> That is why his stance and considerations against Muslims embodied in Mahmud's image resulted in a more negative depiction of the Turk than in *Akhand Hindustan*. His work on Somanatha is his justification for the reconstruction of the temple and his nationalistic activities. The shrine is the metaphor he uses to preserve in Hindu memory the image of an Islam hostile to India to such an extent that his book the *Shrine Eternal* was the channel to tell the story of Somnath as the story of Hinduism resisting Islam. Then it was not incidental that the book had been released the actual day of the inauguration of the temple and the installation of the Somnath idol in a massive state ceremony with the presence of Rajendra Prasad, India's president of the time. The work was thought of and recommended at that time as a 'fascinating souvenir'.<sup>59</sup> This explains the change of disposition in portraying Mahmud of Ghazni. He had to be depicted in a more condemnatory fashion so as to provide a justification for the reconstruction of the temple.

On the other hand, if Munshi is able to make a distinction between the different Muslim rules in India, Allā-ud-dīn's incursion eclipses others in its horror and destruction. Thus Munshi argues:

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<sup>57</sup> Nagindas Sanghavi, *Gujarat. A political Analysis*, p. 145.

<sup>58</sup> Thapar, *Somanatha*, p. 185.

<sup>59</sup> 'Somnath', *The Bombay Chronicle*, 12 May 1951, p. 4.

Before Allā-ud-dīn's invasion Gujārat was very prosperous... But during the following century, Gujārat received neither respite nor mercy from the invaders. Her shrines were desecrated; her wealth was plundered; her women were violated or kidnapped. Forcible conversion was the mildest alternative offered by the invader to the children of the soil. Men, women and children were sold as slaves. People migrated from place to place in vain search of security... Priests, poets, and *sādhus* sought refuge in obscure villages, placing themselves beyond the reach of the ruthless destroyer. All that the terrified people could do was to lock up their women-folk indoors, and to barricade their world behind the bulwarks of caste, *panchāyat* and *mahājan*.<sup>60</sup>

The depiction of this invasion is closer to other common images of what Muslim rule was supposed to mean to India within the context of a more recalcitrant discourse. And if it is true that all of his references are not so homogeneously negative in describing Muslim conquests, it is also true that no reference to Muslim rule or ruler even when described in positive terms achieves the idealization found in his depiction of a Hindu past. As has been argued, 'Munshi has generally ridiculed the Present; and found only in the Past the qualities of grandeur, greatness, sacrifice, courage etc. which had taken possession of his imagination... it is the Past that suits his idealism...'<sup>61</sup> His idea of the Hindu past is the key to understand his image of Indian nation. That is what we explore in the following section of the chapter.

### Historical reverberations in contemporary narratives

It could be said that when historicizing, Munshi does, in a sense, the same other historians do, that is to say, reconstruct and articulate facts in an historical narrative 'selectively'.<sup>62</sup> In

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<sup>60</sup> Munshi, *Gujarāt and its literature*, p. 132.

<sup>61</sup> Mansukhlal Jhaveri, *History of Gujarati Literature*, (New Delhi, 1978), p. 155.

<sup>62</sup> Since 'the historical observer never confronts a bare and simple fact, unrelated to a broader context. Every fact has significance for him only because it fits into a system of ideas he has already formed'. Joseph V.

this respect, it has been discussed in other places how the historian proceeds, in general, utilizing categories to organize historical phenomena, categories derived from the historian's 'practical preferences and attitudes'.<sup>63</sup> But the problem with Munshi is that he puts aside the academic aspect of the task. Thus, '...Munshi's historical works reveal his nationalist bias more than detached scholarship. Due to the overpowering emotional zeal, here displayed in his nationalism, Munshi throw the scholar in the background. The detached objectivity was often sacrificed as the man in him triumphed over the scholar'.<sup>64</sup> Thus, even though 'while interpretation of the past is always a practical endeavour, conducted from within the horizon of the present, by no means does it follow that the interpreter is justified in mutilating the evidence to suit his preconceptions or political passions'.<sup>65</sup> And Munshi is precisely overcome by his political passions while elaborating an historical narrative of the Hindu past.

His lack of historical rigor is in parallel with the distinction he makes between history and culture, for him '[w]hile history is the story of integration and disintegration of human aggregates, culture has been the greatest integrating force in men'.<sup>66</sup> His notion of culture seems to be a more important element. The culture for him is a 'common outlook' which is continuous. Conversely, history is transient in a way, since figures and events go. Thus, what must be nourished is culture, since 'for a people to have a vital culture, it is necessary that they should have a vivid memory of having achieved common triumphs in the past. Whether the triumphs are mythological, historical or imaginary makes little difference, but they must be closely woven into the collective consciousness of the

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Femia, 'An Historicist Critique of 'Revisionist' Methods for Studying the History of Ideas', in James Tully, (ed.), *Meaning and context. Quentin Skinner and his critics*, (Princeton, 1988), p. 168.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>64</sup> Sheth, *Munshi: Self-Sculptor*, p. 14-15.

<sup>65</sup> Femia, 'An Historicist Critique', p. 170.

<sup>66</sup> K.M. Munshi, *Foundations of Indian Culture*, (6th, edn, Mumbai, 1998), p. 3.

people.’<sup>67</sup> However, history could serve culture in its preservation, it can magnify, for instance, the past triumphs or virtues of a culture.

In this way Munshi’s idea of the Indian past is coherent with his scheme of preserving Indian culture –one which means Hindu culture— by creating ‘a vivid memory’ of these ‘common triumphs’. The Gujarati writer distinguishes periods of splendor and decadence. Muslim periods are rather described as decadent, if in varying degrees, whereas Hindu epochs are seen as splendid. Under his perspective Indian history is divided as follows:

- First Period. The Early Aryan Conquests: The Birth of Indian Culture
- Second Period. The First Empire of India: The Age of Organization
- Third Period. Age of International Contacts and Cultural Expansion (150 B.C.—320 A.D.)
- Fourth Period. The Second Indian Empire (320 A.D. to 650 A.D): The Golden Age of India.
- Fifth Period. Struggle for Imperial Sway: Age of Cultural Stagnation (650 A.D.—1175 A.D.)
- Sixth Period. The Age of Resistance and Cultural Decadence (1175 A.D.—1400 A.D.)
- Seventh Period. The Third Empire of India: The Age of New Adjustments: The Renaissance (1399 A.D.—1700 A.D.)
- Eight Period. The Age of Cultural Decadence: Struggle for Imperial Power between Hindus and the British: British Conquest of India (1700 A.D.—1857 A.D.)
- Ninth Period. The Rise of Nationalism: The Age of Foreign Domination (1858 A.D.—1940 A.D.)<sup>68</sup>

He sees in the first period ‘the victorious advance of Aryans’ which is victorious because it gave birth –according to him— to the values which later ‘shaped Hindu culture’. In this context, Munshi attempts to grant Indian culture a millennium of uninterrupted existence. This is also shown in the treatment of the following periods which are characterized by a cultural, intellectual and religious expansion of Indian/Hindu culture, which means that

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>68</sup> Munshi, *Akhand Hindustan*, pp. 117-133.

there is the notion of a Hindu culture that keeps developing even though it already existed as such.

However, the glorious period, the Golden Age, is that of the Guptas, and the greatness Munshi perceives in this period is in the thriving of Hindu culture and its institutions such as *Caturvarnya* or the *varna* system, as well as in a growing consciousness of Bharatavarsa. In other words, its grandiosity conforms to the development of aspects circumscribed within Hindu culture which, as it has been stated, stands for the metonymy of Indian culture.

In contrast, the sixth period is one of decadence and the actors starring in this epoch are Muslims. And if it is true that Munshi mentions some adverse features in previous Hindu regimes, like provincial rivalries and struggles, it is also true that they pale by comparison with Muslim rules and the devastation they are supposed to have generated, for example, the destruction of schools and therefore of culture, the displacement of Sanskrit, among other things.

As referred to above, when dealing with the Mughals, Munshi is able to concede some benefits for this period, though not in a general way since he makes a clear distinction between Akbar and Aurangzeb, the first one defined by a 'cultural synthesis' and the later, by his 'sectarian bias'. But he refers, for instance, to the prosperity experienced under the Moguls particularly in Gujarat. Nevertheless, not everything was good under Mogul administration and society saw the repercussions of it. Hence Munshi notices a kind of social decomposition crystallized in the fact that '[s]ocial barriers were stiffened... untouchability came into existence... women lost the high status which they once enjoyed in the family, and were generally treated as slaves. Co-education in village schools came to



an end.<sup>69</sup> Then, one of the aspects most criticized in Hinduism, untouchability, was supposed to have emerged in a Muslim period.<sup>70</sup> For Munshi ‘the belief that the Shudras were cast into a position of irredeemable social inferiority by wily priests and wicked kings, entertained by some Western scholars and inherited by a section of our educated men, is a myth. Untouchability, as we know in recent ages, was unknown during this period (the Vedic period).’<sup>71</sup>

This is in consonance with what Hindu society was supposed to be in other ages, pre-Muslim periods. According to Munshi, the literature of Gujarat under Muslim rule after the fourteenth century, recreated life as it was before Muslim conquests. In this sense, literature for Munshi is the witness of societies in the past, and the landscape literature offers is of ‘a free [Hindu] society, unknown to this period [a Muslim one]’ where there was ‘co-education; of women, free, educated and versed in the fine arts; of headstrong feminists; of hetairae [*sic*], highly cultured and loyal; of certain degree of general education.’<sup>72</sup> Beyond idealization, the interesting point to underline here is that this representation is referring to Gujarati society, which implies that his idea of Gujarat is in parallelism with his idea of the Indian nation as a whole. Therefore, the points of convergence are evident, both India and Gujarat, as an important region from the nation, have ‘suffered’ Muslims invasions; both are considered to share Aryan culture as their foundation and both praise the Hindu as the cultural expression *par excellence*. Thus his regionalism and his nationalism are complementary rather than antagonist.

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<sup>69</sup> Munshi, *Gujarāt and its Literature*, pp. 225-226.

<sup>70</sup> Untouchability long predates Islam in India and its practice is described in detail in *The Laws of Manu*, composed over two thousand years ago. See *The Laws of Manu* introduced and translated by Wendy Doniger and Brian K. Smith, (New Delhi, 1991). pp. 236-242.

<sup>71</sup> Munshi, *Foundations*, p. 42.

<sup>72</sup> Munshi, *Gujarāt and its Literature*, p. 202.

Unambiguously, Hindu aspects of Indian culture are surrounded by a halo of idealism that is not negated by positive depictions of Muslims. In this, Munshi fits into a more general tendency at this time. It coalesces with the circulating discourses on cultural identity whose representation of a glorious Hindu past is contrasted to a supposedly decadent present period, in which, in addition, the female figure was considered as the parameter of civilization, as the site where modernity or backwardness was going to be measured. Munshi's discourse is circumscribed to the main constructive discourse of the cultural question. This discourse owes much to British authors and administrators but also has its Hindu contributions and elaborations.

In this way, in general terms, although not in a quite recalcitrant manner as other Hindu nationalist figures, Munshi does not conceive Muslim periods in Indian history as positive overall, whereas the Hindu ones are seen in a different light which makes them undeniably praiseworthy. His periodization and characterization of Indian history are, as a matter of fact, a reflection of the image he has of the present age. Thus, patriot Hindus are contrasted to 'disruptionist' or 'master-racist' Muslims, even though he brands as such, a specific sector from Muslim community.

Then the contemporary age has echoes of that previous order of things, as can be inferred from Munshi's ideas. The construction of the historical Muslims—personified in Turks, Afghans or Moguls—is no other than the prefiguration of present-day Muslims. This is apparent in Munshi's narratives of Partition where he describes Muslim action as a repeat of 'historical atrocities' committed by Muslims in the past. We are told that 'Hindu women were kidnapped, their children murdered and Hindu houses set of fire... The R.S.S. faced the attack with rare courage and repelled it at heavy cost to themselves. Their epic heroism also helped the womenfolk, in some cases members of their own family, to commit suicide

when their kidnapping had become inevitable.<sup>73</sup> And even if the Gujarati writer recognizes that Muslims were also attacked, this information is reduced to a mere generalization in which we are told that ‘[m]any and almost incredible stories were heard of the cruelty, ruthlessness and vandalism which was perpetrated by both the communities.’<sup>74</sup> Thus, Hindu attacks on Muslims are simply diluted in abridged information. But his attitude is not new or unique. As was explored in chapter four, Vallabhbhai Patel also tended to omit the responsibility of Hindus in the commitment of atrocities during partition and the only thing they seemed to be responsible for was their following of the example set by Muslims in their aggressions to Hindus.<sup>75</sup>

Elaborating further on this, it is not only in his writings that we see an expression of a negative or rather twofold sentiment toward Muslims. In 1929, Munshi appeared as a witness for the Bombay riots of that year and the ideas expressed on that occasion shed light on the conceptions the Gujarati writer had of the Muslim community. Thus he states

Widows are captured every month and coveted [*sic*] into mahomeda... These Moslem fanatists organise themselves and create a fanaticism [*sic*] ... in the name of the God of Islam and ask him to kill Hindu leaders...

Although I am not Arya Samagist [*sic*] or a Member of the Hindu Mahasabha, *I believe that the time has come for the hindus that if they want to be safe from these fanatic mahomedans they all should join the Arya Samagist movement and retord [*sic*] the mahomedans in the same way as they are retording [*sic*] the hindus.*<sup>76</sup>

As is evident, this is an extremely belligerent speech that advocates an idea of retaliation in the name of ‘justice’ or ‘defence’. There is the elaboration of an image of Hindu victims oppressed by Muslim ‘fanatics’. At some point, Munshi’s ideas constitute the reproduction

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<sup>73</sup> Munshi, *Indian Constitutional Documents*, 1, p. 132

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>75</sup> For further elaboration on this see chapter five.

<sup>76</sup> Emphasis added. Munshi Private Papers, reel 18, file 13, p. 437. NMML (D).

of stereotypical images of Muslims circulating within truly extremist circles of the Hindu right. For instance, the image of Muslims harassing Hindu women is pointed out in the description as well as the frequently referred fanaticism of the Muslim community as a whole; both aspects are rather a formulaic depiction of Muslims by the Gujarati author. Munshi's expressions reproduce the discourses on Islam of institutions such as the Hindu Mahasabha and its leaders and they even show an open support to these organisations by asking people to join them. But the most unfortunate expression is his idea of retaliation on Mahomedans from the part of Hindus. And the discursive line is rather similar to mahasabhaite rhetoric. Compare, for instance, the incitation to violence by Vamanrao Mukadam, member of the legislative council of the local government of Bombay and member of the Hindu Mahasabha who between 1927 and 1929 toured some cities in Gujarat with his aggressive discourse. According with an authority's secret report, he exhorted Hindus to join the Maha Sabha and to prepare to sacrifice their lives if necessary. He finally said that "Murder can only be avenged by murder".<sup>77</sup> Whereas Mukadam's discourse leaves no doubt about the kind of action to be taken against Muslim community, Munshi's discourse is much more ambiguous and could be understood differently by the people that are being addressed, it could be understood even in the same lines that Mukadam's message. Fortunately, this expression was not publicly made by Munshi, but it is revealing of his real thoughts about the Muslim community.

All of these features delimit Munshi's nationalist thought which, as shown, backs up an image of a Hindu civilization which has continually been assaulted by the foreign enemy even if with greater or lesser impacts at different junctures. In a more tolerant attitude,

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<sup>77</sup> Home Department Special note, Vamanrao Mukadam, HDSB, file no. 355 (59)A VIII, p. 125. MSA (B).

Munshi recognizes a multi-articulated Indian culture as is depicted in the following passage:

‘Indian Culture is not merely Aryan Culture but very much more, though the latter glistens like a thread of gold through many and varied elements which now go to make up our way of life. We cannot repudiate the Gandhara art because of Greek influence. We cannot disown the Taj Mahal because of its Islamic inspiration. We cannot reject the art, the manners, the institutions, which Hindu-Muslim adjustments have given birth to. We cannot even throw off the Western influence and institutions which have grown into our life. Indian Culture is a living force. It absorbs alien elements when necessary but transmutes them into a new pattern of homogeneous richness.’<sup>78</sup>

But the revelation subsequent to this is that Hindu culture prevails at the end, no matter the amount of external influences. Even though there is the acknowledgment that Indian culture as a whole has been nourished by several foreign influences, Hindu culture transforms them subsuming the other elements within its fold, and thus, in the end, the Hindu dominates over other cultural trends.

Following from this, Munshi saw it as his task to preserve the essentials of Hindu Indian culture. It is a role not to be undertaken in isolation since the sector he identifies as the ‘dominant minority’ has an unavoidable responsibility in this conservation project. As it has been pointed out, ‘Munshi’s activities in diverse fields had a common objective: expanding the class of the educated and intellectual all over India who would infuse new ideas for cultural revitalization in society...’<sup>79</sup> A common life is only possible if there is a ‘common outlook’, which is what culture means according to the writer, and the task for the dominant minority is, in a sense, making common this outlook, then ‘common norms of conduct [are] approved by the thinking and active minority and generally accepted by the people.’<sup>80</sup> Accordingly, Munshi’s endeavor is to sanction what he considers to be the

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<sup>78</sup> Munshi, *Indian Constitutional Documents*, 1, opening pages.

<sup>79</sup> Sheth, *Munshi: Self-Sculptor*, p. xviii.

<sup>80</sup> Munshi, *Foundations*, p. 5.

national culture, that is to say, a Hindu culture that is able to dissolve or absorb other influences. Minorities have their rights to their own cultural expression, but they are expected to accept the prime position of the 'national' culture.

In consequence, as revealed by all the previous features, Munshi's principles correspond to a cultural nationalist trend where a Hindu dimension of culture express itself as the dominant pattern in the articulation of a national identity. The idea of an Aryan past shaping Indian 'millenarian' culture is a defining aspect in cultural nationalism which is also shared by the most opinionated Hindu nationalists when referring to the foundations of Indian culture. It is clear that Munshi is an exponent of 'soft Hindutva' but intermittently for sometimes his stance went hard against Islam. Therefore, he is persistent in praising Hindu culture to the detriment of other cultural expressions, mainly the Muslim one. In this same sense, although at some points of his narratives he attempts at being self-controlled in his considerations of Muslims, he contradicts himself with other writings which articulate a derogatory image of Muslims. This picture is not so distant from the representation constructed by more extremist sectors of the Hindu right.

The next chapter will continue examining the cultural and historical formulations of the Gujarati writer but the ones articulated through his fiction works which are for him, as a representative of a dominant minority, another means to spread and embed in collective imagination this particular kind of consciousness of Gujarati and Indian/Hindu subjectivities.

## Chapter seven

### Narrative representations of the Hindu past: *Gujarat no-Nath* and *Jaya Somanath*

The previous chapter explored the understanding of a Hindu identity in the historical and political discourses of K.M Munshi; one that was composed in terms of its contrasts with an opposing Muslim image. While the Muslim was said to represent belligerence, fundamentalism and strength/disrespect, the Hindu was said to epitomize pacifism, tolerance and weakness/respect. From chapter one to six we have sought to disentangle the way this conflicting Hindu-Muslim dichotomy has been developed by diverse individuals and organizations advocating a variety of Hindu expressions. From the Gujarati literati that discerned in Muslim rules both positive and negative aspects to more recalcitrant practices of Hindu nationalism like the one sponsored by the Mahasabha that denigrated Muslims across the board, there has been a long trajectory in the process of delineating the cultural identities coexisting in different ways in the Indian subcontinent.

In this context, Munshi's political and historical discourses throw light on the way a Hindu national identity is imagined and articulated, but an analysis of his literary discourse is also necessary because 'novels are a continuation of history, uttering what history could not... Novels had a deep *internal* relation to historical work, for they helped spell the same ideas, only in a different manner or style: they tried to spell, as much as serious history sought to do a self-respecting relation with the community's past.'<sup>1</sup> In other words, fiction is a space where attempts are made to come to terms with the past; it is another realm where a nationalist feeling can also be explored with the aid of imaginative channels that recreate

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<sup>1</sup> Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Unhappy Consciousness, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the formation of nationalist discourse in India*, (Bombay, Oxford, 1995), p. 111.

emotionally historical facts, some of them incontrovertible and others that remain in the ground of the possible but that gain authenticity with the construction of a literary discourse. Then, the historical literary narrative enriches or modifies historical constructs and at times, it is a better channel of transmission at mass level to convey historical representations that delineate a particular cultural identity.

Thus, this chapter will analyze Munshi's nationalist representations in greater detail but in a narrative universe which profits from the literary resources that fiction provides. Therefore, I will explore in this section two emblematic literary works by the Gujarati writer in order to unravel more widely his ideas on nation, the other and Gujarat in an attempt to understand their impact and appraise their influence and insertion in social imagination. The interesting point in analyzing Munshi's literary discourse lies on the fact that it poses the challenge of decoding a literary language and of calibrating to what extent the literary construction matches the author's own ideology. It is through the mediation of a narrator that we receive such constructions; therefore it is not possible to do a perfect equivalence with the ideas of narrator, characters and author. There have always been instances of misreading literary texts by confounding what is expressed through the voices of characters or narrators with what an author wanted to express, therefore we will try to avoid misinterpretation of Munshi's literary discourse by not forcing it to fit in his ideological notions. But if disentangling literary writings may imply certain hermeneutic risks, it also, provides the possibility of observing how literature and history may be intertwined and work as a shared space where identity-building processes take place; where cultural dilemmas can be explored and attempts made at their solution; and where reflections on issues of nation, culture and nationality can be undertaken.



## Overlapping of history and literature

Munshi's works scrutinized in this chapter are *The Master of Gujarat* (*Gujarath-no Nath*) and *Jaya Somanath* since they are emblematic of a heroic understanding of Indian history. Both of them recreate a Hindu past full in splendor and magnificence that is, if not terminated, at least deeply transgressed by the invasions of Muslim conquerors according to the perspective of these works. *The Master of Gujarat*, published in 1918, deals with some chivalric episodes of the Chalukya dynasty of medieval India. The main plot of the story concerns the resistance of Hindu rulers to Muslim invaders. But there are also collateral stories of a romantic type aimed at emphasizing the brahmanical qualities of the epic characters. This underpins the notion that the envisaged Hindu identity had nothing to do with an inclusive Hinduism but an elitist one that idealized brahmanical Hinduism and its principles as the normative dimension of culture. And the epilogue to the story is a message of unity among the Hindu rulers –that have their own conflicts for power that are called to be overcome in order to face what is considered the Islamic threat.

On the other hand, *Jaya Somanath* was published in 1940 and tells the story of a dancer of the temple of Lord Somanath, her devotion for the deity and her relationship with king Bheemdev. The story has as background a symbolic historical episode that occurred in the eleventh century that is a not a minor element neither in the novel nor in the historical trajectory of Gujarat. This event is the destruction of the temple of Somanath<sup>2</sup> in 1025 at the hands of a Muslim general, Mahmud of Ghazni who, needless to say, plays the villain

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<sup>2</sup> This is a common topic not only in the histories of Gujarat but also in literature, for instance, the very first Gujarati novel published in 1868, *Karan Ghelo* by Nandashankar Mehta considers three themes, one of them being precisely the devastation of the temple of Somnath by Mahmud of Ghazni. The other themes are the defeat of Patai Raval, king of Champaner at the hands of Muhammad Begdo and the downfall and death of Karan Vaghelo, the last Hindu king of Gujarat. See Sitansu Yashaschandra, 'Towards Hind Svarāj: An Interpretation of the Rise of Prose in the Nineteenth-Century Gujarati Literature', *Social Scientist*, 23, (1995), pp. 41-55.

of the story, and whose appraisal in history in Munshi's eyes, explored in the previous chapter, showed a gradation in the disapproval of the historical figure. In general terms, the Mahmud's figure delineated by Munshi was ambivalent, sometimes as a fundamentalist Muslim and other times, as a general moved by his interest in conquest. But it is clear that this twofold stance depends on the historical moment in which Munshi's works were produced. However, at the end, Mahmud was not calibrated in positive terms with his final representation as a conqueror, fanatic, and temple-desecrator.

A common factor of the works studied here is a historicity that attempts to develop a 'constructedness' of the past<sup>3</sup> in which the past derives meaning from the present. The end of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century was a time in which such constructs were made in a particularly heightened form. Munshi's novels stand at the interface of literature and history, and although they take narrative liberties, they also encompass a desire for historicity. They give the events of the past a heroic quality that allows the Gujarati writer to show the grandiosity of India in the past, in contrast to its supposed degenerate present.

A commentator on Munshi's novels has observed that:

Munshi's views on history not merely excuse, but permit and even encourage liberties with historical facts provided the result pleases us as beautiful. He is on the side of those who believe that history is not a science but an art. According to him, facts of history so painfully gleamed and scientifically sifted by the historians are not as important as the interpretation that the individual historian puts on them in the light of his sympathetic imagination. Munshi takes the heroic view of history and regards it essentially as an account of the character and achievement of great men who fulfill the laws of their being on the spectacular stage of history.'<sup>4</sup>

Thus, the clearest premise in looking at Munshi's literary texts is that they do not follow the postulate of *art for art's sake* that some other writers claimed for their own works and for

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<sup>3</sup> For details on the idea of constructedness of history or history being ideological, see Kaviraj, *The Unhappy Consciousness*, p. 108.

<sup>4</sup> R. I. Patel, *The Novels of Munshi*, (Surat, 1959), p. 23.

literature in general,<sup>5</sup> which has been an issue in constant debate. Instead, his narrative works have a strong ideological dose and build up a specific historical elaboration in favor of a Hindu identity for the Indian nation. Munshi assumes this as his task, that is to say, spreading the notion of a Hindu glorious past and Hindu culture as the core of the Indian self and the Indian nation. This, under the precept that ‘the nation, as a form of cultural *elaboration*... is an agency of *ambivalent* narration that holds culture at its most productive position, as a force for subordination, fracturing, diffusing, reproducing, as much as producing, creating, forcing, guiding’.<sup>6</sup> In other words, culture is a key notion but not in an anthropological sense because it tends to omit its coercive dimension. In that context, culture is mainly defined as a shared system of customs, traditions, beliefs and values but this definition forgets that culture has also a normative dimension.<sup>7</sup> The nation understood as a cultural formation has also this normative aspect by proposing a standard model that aims at the obliteration of difference. It has a dimension of power and by extension, of conflict by trying to impose a unique national pattern to the detriment of differentiated groups, of minorities. Munshi’s novels explored here elaborate a cultural paradigm that attempts at criticizing and disciplining the ‘dissidents’ of the Hindu mainstream he contributed to articulate through fiction. And his was a conscious effort to define and

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<sup>5</sup> Supporting this stance was Oscar Wilde that took part in the Aesthetic Movement which expressed that true art was detached from any didactic or utilitarian function, even if some of his works have an important dose of social critique. For a general view on the topic see Frank Kermode and John Hollander, (eds), *The Oxford Anthology of English Literature. 1800 to the Present*, (2 vols, New York, London: 1973), 2.

<sup>6</sup> Homi K. Bhabha (ed), *Nation and narration*, (London and New York: 1990). p. 3-4.

<sup>7</sup> According to Said, culture can be considered as ‘a system of discriminations and evaluations through which a series of exclusions can be legislated from above’ when the state regulates this culture. Then ‘[a]narchy, disorder, irrationality, inferiority, bad taste and immorality are, in this way, defined and then located outside culture and civilization by the state and its institutions’. For a detailed discussion see Edward Said cited in Veena Das, “Communities as political actors: the question of cultural rights” in Veena Das, (ed), *Critical events: an anthropological perspective on contemporary India*, (Delhi, 1995), pp. 84-117.

spread the ideal Gujarati and Indian identity he envisaged both for the region and the nation.

In chapter six, Munshi's idea of culture was explored and the findings showed that culture is an essential notion in his historical conceptions. Culture provides people with what he called 'common outlook' in which there is a common memory of past triumphs and achievements. Whether or not these are real or mythical is irrelevant for the novelist. In these novels, K. M. Munshi was clearly committed to the elaboration of this common outlook. In the transmission and preservation of culture, he envisioned a particular sector of society as being responsible for carrying out this task. Thus the 'dominant minority', as seen in the previous chapter, is a privileged and responsible sector whose task is both producing the leading cultural principles and sanctioning what is going to be considered as the national culture. The mission for this sector is making common this outlook for the rest of the population, since as he referred, this minority group was supposed to be the active and thinking sector and the general population was only meant to accept the outlook created by the former.

This way, Munshi assumed for himself such a role, namely as a vanguard member of the dominant minority or Hindu intelligentsia. The endeavor of shaping the Indian self was shared by other writers that earlier than Munshi had assumed this as their mission. Govardhanram Madhavram Tripathi (1885-1907) was one such figure who thought of fiction as the convenient space to carry out his task. He considered that 'reality in the flesh and blood under the guise of fiction can supply the ordinary reader with subtler moulds and finer casts for the formation of his inner self'.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Govardhanram, cited in Sudhir Chandra, *Continuing Dilemmas. Understanding Social Consciousness*, (New Delhi: 2002). p. 192.

Munshi's literary activity, then, can be considered in the light of this role, in the effort to expand the cultural archetype sanctioned by his class. Thus, the following section will explore in greater detail the kind of cultural mainstream Munshi visualized and recreated through fiction.

### *The Master of Gujarat*

The idea of a glorious past has been persistently present in the histories and literature of Indian authors from the second half of the nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century. Literature, particularly, became an important realm for the contestation to the colonial critique of Indian society.<sup>9</sup> In Munshi's case, he, like many other authors turned his face towards the past to search in it the magnificent civilization that was referred to by Orientalists like William Jones, who saw ancient India as a great civilization. The critique of this entire civilization carried out subsequently by the Anglicists – such as James Mill and Thomas Macaulay – served, if anything, to strengthen the eventual Indian counter-reaction, leading to a yet greater glorification of this past. Menakshee Mukherjee has pointed out that for writers and historians of that period 'any past, historical or otherwise, was better than the miserable present, and the wonder-evoking though unreal happenings of a bygone era were an anodyne to the miseries of present existence'.<sup>10</sup> Such a reaction to modernity had its parallels elsewhere in the world, with a

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<sup>9</sup> Several authors have referred the fact that nationalist thought must be seen in the light of colonial discourse on Indian civilization, a discourse that unleashed a series of questionings and reflections about the own identity and culture. Among them is Chetan Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths* and also John Zavos, *The emergence of Hindu Nationalism in India*.

<sup>10</sup> Meenakshi Mukherjee, *Realism and Reality. The novel and society in India*, (Delhi, 1985), p. 45

widespread tendency to look back at the past as a way of escaping from a present period that was not considered so fortunate.<sup>11</sup> In the case of Munshi, it has been said that:

...the humiliation of political subjection, economic slavery and moral and spiritual despair is as bitterly felt by Munshi... Only the glories of the Past can make up for the miseries of the Present. So he gives up his attempt at depicting the Present and looks for national pride and human dignity in the most glorious period of the history of Gujarat, the age of the Chaulukyas of Gujarat, in fact, a Hindu rule.<sup>12</sup>

In the previous chapter, we explored Munshi's scheme of Indian historical periods, and he how highlighted the Hindu phases as generally prosperous and thriving whereas Muslim epochs were considered periods of social, political and cultural decline. Consistent with this representation, the writer articulated in *The Master of Gujarat*, an epic of chivalric virtues that praises Hindu rules, which are, in turn, contrasted to Islamic regimes since 'a real history of its own people, of its collective self, must also include historical narratives about others – those who are different, strange, unfamiliar, subordinate, threatening.'<sup>13</sup>

*The Master of Gujarat* is part of a trilogy together with *Patan-ni Prabhuta* (*The Greatness of Patan*, 1916) and *Rajadhiraj* (*King of Kings*, 1922-23) that, in general, 'depict Hindu Gujarat at its best, [and]... made a strong political appeal to the people of Gujarat who, till they appeared, lacked consciousness of their heroic heritage. Some of the characters, which were mere names before have now found a proud and permanent place in the popular imagination.'<sup>14</sup> In particular, *The Master of Gujarat* describes the adventures of several warriors very close in their depiction to medieval knights that fight for their

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<sup>11</sup> For instance, the Romantic Movement in nineteenth century Europe also looked back at the past in an endeavour of escaping from of the present. For a general view see Frank Kermode and John Hollander, (eds), *The Oxford Anthology of English Literature.2*.

<sup>12</sup> R. I. Patel, *The Novels of Munshi*, p. 22.

<sup>13</sup> Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Unhappy Consciousness*, p. 117.

<sup>14</sup> Kamala Subramanyam, *et al*, *Munshi's World of Imagination*, (Bombay, 1962). p. 54.

kingdoms or for the women they honor. But as a background to these adventurous episodes there is what is considered to be the imminent menace of Islam in India.

This way, Kirtidev, a young warrior of the story, is the most apprehensive witness of Muslim onslaughts in India. But he is also the witness of internal conflicts among Hindu rulers, and then his clamor is:

‘Can’t you see? Don’t you hear the deadly thunder of dark clouds which are gathering in the distance? Patan and Avanti are at war; Saurashtra is waging war on Patan; Mewar and Chitor are fighting... No one understands the threat that I am talking about... Only the king of Kashmir understands. Do you know anything at all about the yavans who razed Patan and destroyed Somnath in Bhimdev Maharaj’s time? They are terrible, heartless brutes, and in trying to stop their hordes even the brave king of Kashmir is beginning to lose heart!’<sup>15</sup>

Kirtidev is truly concerned for the advances of Islam in India and the supposed indolence of Hindus before the imminent threat that the yavans or Muslims embody for him.<sup>16</sup> His language and expressions are unequivocal of his animadversion against them, words such as ‘brutes’ or ‘hordes’ have a hard negative connotation that conveys an image to the reader that necessarily reciprocates the rejection that Kirtidev feels himself.

As part of the articulation of a Hindu cultural core, we can appreciate in the novel the invocation of characters quite aware and proud of their brahmanical origin. This illustrates how the cultural identity was formulated not only in terms of Hinduism in general, but within a particular tradition of Hinduism that was distant from popular

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<sup>15</sup> The analysis of both novels, the *Master of Gujarat* and *Jaya Somanath* is based on their English translations however some of their passages are contrasted with the Gujarati originals to find out the divergences. K.M. Munshi, N.D. Jotwani, (trans), *The Master of Gujarat*, (trans. 1995, of orig. edn, Bombay, 1918), p. 196.

<sup>16</sup> The supposed indolence or inactivity of Hindus is a topic present in several writings of the period. One of the Indian authors that elaborated the idea of indolence was Premchand (1880-1936), one of the columns of Hindi and Urdu literature, by means of his narrative, he took this indolence to the extreme. A good illustration is his ‘*Shatranj ke khiladi*’ (‘The Chess Players’) where an exacerbated lethargy resulted in the conquest of Lucknow when the *nawab*, the chess players themselves and the whole society paid no attention to the British expansion. But the story concerns the indolence by Muslim rulers so for Premchand the failure in defence was Indian and not Hindu. The story relates the event in the best possible depiction: ‘Till today, the king of no country had been defeated peacefully, without any bloodshed. This was not the non-violence on which God feels happy. This was the cowardice on which even the biggest cowards shed tears.’ Premchand, ‘*Shatranj ke khiladi*’. In turn, this inactivity feature is closely related to the notion of Hindu effeminacy that will be later developed in this chapter.

expressions of Hindu culture. Thus, Brahmanism is the mold in which national culture should be shaped. Kak, for instance, another Hindu warrior, is one of these characters who is very proud of their Brahmanical background:

Kak was very conscious of his high birth and tradition as a Brahmin, and his high status in the military. He looked down contemptuously at that weak, cowering half-beast of a man. 'Who are you?', he asked the man.  
'Ya.. va..', the man said something which Kak could not follow.  
'Stop all this la... va...!' Kak shouted. 'Tell me who you are, or else...'. With this Kak took up his staff and threatened the man.  
The man dragged himself forward with folded hands and tried to touch Kak's feet. But Kak stepped back immediately and warned the man. 'Don't touch me! Just tell me who you are...'  
The man rubbed his beard against the ground and said, 'Musalmin..'. Kak did not know what the man was saying.  
'Curse you! Don't you know any human language?'  
'Yavan..?', the man said.<sup>17</sup>

The 'musalmin' character is depicted in this passage as a 'half-beast of a man'. Whereas the conquering hoarded of Muslim warriors are depicted as violent brutes, the individual Muslim of this passage is shown as being brutal in his stupidity. He inspires nothing but rejection which is reinforced by his attempt to touch Kak's feet. Kak, being a Brahman, cannot even imagine being so polluted by a being of unknown caste. Thus, a binomial of barbarian *versus* civilized—that circulated within the colonial discourse to refer to Indian society in comparison with the British—is utilized in this kind of anti-Muslim depiction to refer in a metonymical way to Islamic civilization. Then, in the light of this representation Hindus are civilized and Muslims are savages.

In addition, it is clear that the novel not only portrays a negative picture of Islam, for even within Hinduism there are traditions that are not considered as pure. Then the narrator tells us that:

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<sup>17</sup> Munshi, *The Master of Gujarat*, p. 84.



In those days, apart from the two pure religious traditions of orthodox brahminism and jainism, there was extant amongst a few people the impure tantric tradition, notorious for its dark and evil rites. Tantrics ate and drank shamelessly, boasted for their vile deeds, and tried to win influence in society by frightening pious and ignorant people. While selfish and vengeful persons often sought tantric help for their own narrow gains, even the otherwise powerful and respected persons in society were wary of the tantrics.<sup>18</sup>

The opposition between Brahminism and Tantrism is relevant in defining a cultural mainstream. Brahminism as well as Jainism represent pure traditions whereas Tantrism is just the opposite, that is, impure and this impurity lies on the supposed perverse nature of the tantrics who frighten everybody, that is to say, pious people, the ignorant ones as well as ‘respected persons’.

And within the category of respected people there are feminine figures as well who play a fundamental role in showing Brahmanism as a high tradition. Manjari, for instance, the heroine in the story is a sophisticated and learned woman who is depicted as being proud to be a Brahman:

Mother, mother! You gave birth to me, but it seems you do not know me! Or you would not ask me to marry a shravak! Do you know who I am? I am a Brahmin, the daughter of a world-renowned poet! And I am proud of my birth and my heritage! How can a girl like me live with a shravak?<sup>19</sup>

Manjari takes pride of her upbringing and knowledge, she boasted of her origin and despised people she considered inferior particularly for their lack of knowledge. Manjari, being a Brahmin, stands for culture and noble customs. Her claims reveal unequivocally how proud she is of her cultural background:

Mother, our family can trace its pure, unmixed lineage from the ancient sages who sang the holy Vedas and sought union with Brahma! Shall I now defile this sacred tradition by accepting your offer? And become a low-born in all my future lives? Is it not better for me to remain unmarried in this one life? Goddess Saraswati remained unmarried! Why can't I?<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 209.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

She is a literate woman who knows Sanskrit and the sacred Hindu scriptures. She exults in her noble and dignified lineage. That is why she so firmly rejects the plan to marry her to somebody of a lower caste. Her Brahmanism, then, is her pride and a condition that regulates her behavior and also a sort of ‘virtue’ she is more than willing to preserve. In addition, she is a feminine figure who stands for what a woman should be according to the nineteenth century idea. In this rationale, women in the past –in the Hindu glorious past— were as literate and learned as men, they were freer, more assertive, and skilled in fine arts.<sup>21</sup> This fortunate situation was terminated, according to several authors –Munshi among them— with the arrival of the *mlechchas* or Muslim invaders.<sup>22</sup>

This way, *The Master of Gujarat* is the assessment of Brahmanism as a high and noble tradition, that is calibrated *vis-à-vis* lower castes but also before other traditions outside the Hindu fold such as the case of Islam, which is seen as a threat to the harmonious order that Brahmanism is supposed to embody.

Accordingly and as expressed before, his literary works are quite a useful device for Munshi to sanction a particular cultural paradigm that is not only translated into Hinduism as a whole but in a particular high caste tradition of Hindu expression. As we have seen, these ideas are articulated through literary channels, therefore, after exploring *Jaya Somanath*, we will calibrate to what extent characters and narrator’s ideas correspond with the author’s own thoughts and ideology.

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<sup>21</sup> Munshi, *Gujarāt and its literature*, p. 202.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. pp. 225-226. And there are a number of studies that explore the relevance of the female figure in the construction of the nationalist discourse. See in this respect Sucheta Mazumdar, “Moving away from a secular vision? Women, nation, and the cultural construction of Hindu India” in Valentin Moghadam, *Identity, politics & women. Cultural reassertions and feminisms in international perspective*, (Bolder: 1994); Partha Chatterjee, ‘The Nation and its women’ in *The Nation and its Fragments. Colonial and postcolonial histories*, (Princeton: 1993); Uma Chakravarti, *Rewriting history. The life and times of Pandita Ramabai*, (Delhi: 1998); Judith E. Walsh, “What women learned when men gave them advice: rewriting patriarchy in late nineteenth century Bengal”, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 56, (1997) and Parita Mukta, *Upholding the common life. The community of Mirabai*, (Delhi: 1994).

As for *Jaya Somanath*, it is a narrative recreation of an historical episode that became a kind of archetype symbolizing Muslim hostility towards Hindus and Hinduism. The novel has parallel stories of love and treason but its portrayal of Hindu culture is quite illustrative of a literary discourse building up an incontrovertible cultural grandiosity that was supposedly devastated by the onslaught of the *mlechchas* or the Muslim conquerors. One of the aspects underlined in the context of past glory is the bravery of Hindu people. This provided a counter to the common stereotype propagated by the British of Muslim virility and courage as against Hindu docility, if not effeminacy.<sup>23</sup> And as seen in chapter one, the Gujarati literati of the end of the nineteenth century shared to some extent this perspective and called on the Hindus to overcome their passivity and weakness. But this belief would be later adopted and further elaborated by recalcitrant Hindu organisations that developed a belligerent discourse that called on Hindus to confront Muslims aggressively.

This way, literary works provided an opportunity to vindicate Hindus that were seen, both from foreign and local perspectives, less masculine than Muslims. As expressed by Mukherjee ‘the framework of history afforded the novelist a way to glorify the past, and the past, however nebulous, meant the pre-British past: any tale of past bravery or heroism vindicated present servitude.’<sup>24</sup>

In this sense, from the very beginning *Jaya Somanath* breaks with the formulaic binomial of Hindu effeminacy-Muslim masculinity. In this work we can appreciate Hindu people as heroic, the same for men as for women. The setting of the story is the historical

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<sup>23</sup> In this respect, James Mill described Hindus as eunuchs and expressed that they had the qualities of slaves. Conversely, Muslims seemed to him less docile and more vigorous, a quality that –according to the author— was positively evaluated by the British. See *The History of British India*, p. 326.

<sup>24</sup> Mukherjee, *Realism and Reality*, p. 46.

episode of the destruction of the temple of Somanath in 1025 A. D. and almost every single character, except for the characters playing the villains, has his or her moment to display courageousness.

The novel deals with Mahmud's conquest in India whose main objective, as related in the story, was looting the temple of Lord Somanath. In the narrative, Mahmud had destroyed many cities on his way to Somanath and had also corrupted several rulers who accepted his bribes and presents in an effort to avoid being destroyed by his army that, we are told, is as huge as 'a giant python'. Thus the literary representation of this event was articulated in a religious dimension that recreated the event as part of a supposed perennial confrontation between Hinduism and Islam. As seen in the previous chapter, there were two main possibilities in conveying this event, one favored the religious character of this episode and the other would privilege the military feature of the incident. As Romila Thapar noticed, the first version gained ground during the twentieth century and an event that could be perceived in a secular dimension was accounted for in a religious fashion.<sup>25</sup> Then the narratives of the episode started to spread the idea that Ghazni's incursions 'were raids with the demolition of an idol or the plunder of a temple city as their object, rather than serious attempts at conquest...'.<sup>26</sup>

While trying to vindicate Hindu supposed vulnerability, the narrative sculpts the figure of several Hindu warriors willing to face the Muslim menace, for instance, Sajjan, a brave Chauhan warrior does his best to stop Mahmud. His is a lonely enterprise that reaches a good ending because despite of his own death, Sajjan could inflict damage to Mahmud's army. Therefore, the heroic status of Sajjan is underlined. He is epitomized as a courageous

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<sup>25</sup> Romila Thapar, *Somanatha*, pp. 183-185.

<sup>26</sup> *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, (Oxford: 1907), I, p. 433.

Hindu warrior in defense of his religion, not of his kingdom or ruler. By contrast, we are told what kind of man the Turk general is, in the episode of the persecution of Mahmud at the hands of Sajjan

It was the Sultan of Ghaznee, Yaminudaula Mahamood Nizamuddin Kasim Mohamood. Though starting life as a poor and unknown man, he had acquired immense wealth and power... Following in the footsteps of his father, he started to plunder the untold riches of India. Lahore surrendered, Multan fell quickly. The Hindu king when vanquished began to seek his favours. The united armies of Gwalior and Kanauj, Delhi and Sapaldaksha were defeated. Nagarkot, the city of wealth, was seized by him. He aspired to be the torch-bearer of Islam and to achieve immortality by destroying idols. He razed the temples of Mathura of age-old glory. The plundered crowns of deities he gave to the women of his zenana.

There was no limit to his ambition. He had a generous heart and the imagination of a poet. By some glorious action, he wanted to be remembered for eternity. What Khalif Omar, the greatest among the Khalifs of Islam, had done, he wanted to do. He inherited the love of art and culture from his Iranian mother... He wanted Ghaznee to be the first city in the world. He had a great flair for winning the hearts of other people. A brave warrior himself, he could appreciate bravery in others. There was a place in his heart for people of all faiths—provided they did not oppose him. He could not tolerate idol-worship, yet he admired bravery even in idol-worshippers.<sup>27</sup>

It is clear that Mahmud's figure is not depicted in absolutely negative terms. The portrait points out his several virtues: a generous heart, his love for art and culture, the imagination of a poet, his charisma and appeal to people, his bravery and even certain religious tolerance only possible if the ruler was not contradicted. However, the stature of Mahmud is measured, at the end, by his intolerance and his eagerness for gaining 'the untold riches of India,' which is a kind of familiar tradition inherited from his father who already had the custom of plundering Indian cities. But the most salient feature in Mahmud's intricate personality is his fundamentalism translated in his attachment to Islam and in his activity of desecrating temples and destroying idols. And this condition would be emphasized in subsequent lines in the work that reinforces the idea of Mahmud's 'mission of desecrating

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<sup>27</sup> K.M. Munshi, *Jaya Somanath*, (trans, 1976, of orig. edn, Bombay, 1940) p. 77.

Somanath'.<sup>28</sup> Then, Mahmud's description seems to suggest that being a devout Muslim necessarily implies an equivalence with being a fanatic and an idol breaker. This is a premise for achieving immortality in the attempt to become the 'torch-bearer of Islam'.

Another aspect that is worth underlining in this passage is the suggestion of Muslims being polygamous. This is patent in the information that Mahmud not only razed Hindu temples, he looted their richness to give it to his several women. This way such an elaboration is not a curious occurrence, it has the echoes of some colonial ideas –also circulating in Hindu circles— that delineated and later, disseminated the image of Muslims as promiscuous and licentious, as hypermasculine that supposedly represented a real threat to Hindu women.<sup>29</sup> In this context, the problem for Hindus was that in contrast to Muslims, they did control their sexuality whereas the latter were licentious and, moreover, accepting the notion that Hindus were weaker than Muslims, they were not even prepared to protect their women.

Hence, in general terms, even if Mahmud's characterization refers to some of his good qualities, it also provides an image of the traditional Mahmud circulating in the most opinionated Hindu circles that saw in the conquest of the Turk in the eleventh century nothing but a display of fanaticism and bigotry towards religious faiths different to Islam, particularly Hinduism. And unfortunately this image was widely disseminated through the literature of the period.<sup>30</sup> Gradually, the stance of the Gujarati literati of the end of the

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p.110.

<sup>29</sup> The pervasiveness of this idea is still evident in contemporary India. For instance, it is interesting to look at the past-building process among Maratha women of the Delhi's wing of the Rashtriya Sevika Samiti who make an open allusion to a supposed exacerbated Muslim sexuality. They say even Akbar, known generally as a good Muslim ruler, had many women in his harem and that he used to disguise himself as a woman in order to peep other women. See Kalyani Devaki Menon, "'We will become Jijabai': historical tales of Hindu nationalist women in India' *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 64, (2005), pp. 103-126.

<sup>30</sup> See in this respect Riho Isaka, 'Gujarati intellectuals and history writing in the Colonial Period', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37(2002), pp. 4867-4872.

nineteenth century about pointing out the positive and the negative aspects of Islamic rules in India was replaced by an opinion considering Muslim arrivals from conquerors, traders, preachers or settlers as unfavorable to India. The differentiated groups were seen through the simplifying label of Muslim invaders. In this rhetoric, the destruction of Somanatha became symbolic of the permanent wound in Hindu civilization at the hands of Muslim intruders and rulers. Mahmud then became the emblem for fanaticism and the leader of a religious war against Hinduism.

While Hindu warriors are shown as being courageous in battle, Hindu women are seen to express their bravery through their willingness for self-sacrifice. Thus, in the episode when Mahmud vanquishes the fort of Bhamaria which is protected by another brave Hindu, Ghogha Bapa who is Sajjan's father, there is an impressive scene where Hindu women defend themselves and their virtue by their own massive immolation to avoid being enslaved and dishonored by the conquering Muslims.<sup>31</sup> This way we are told how they entered the pyre and committed *sati*—the controversial ritual of the widow's immolation in the pyre of her husband—after doing the proper worship to their god. Thus, “they offered worship to the Sun-god, to their family god and then, with a smile on their faces, entered the fire. These heroic women performed *jauhar* bravely and cheerfully. Oh God! I, their teacher, their father, had lived to perform their obsequies!...”<sup>32</sup> Munshi depicts the Muslim conquerors as being left for the most part awestruck by this display of courage, though a few cannot help acting in a characteristically iconoclastic way:

The soldiers came in shouting ‘Allahho Akbar’. They must have thought that there would be some people inside the fort, and lest they might be ambushed, they entered the fort slowly and cautiously. They were amazed to find complete quiet reigning in the deserted

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<sup>31</sup> An approach on the topic of heroic Hindu women (*viranganas*) in medieval India can be seen in Nancy Martin-Kershaw, “Mirabai in the academy and the politics of identity”, in Mandakranta Bose, (ed), *Faces of the feminine in ancient, medieval and modern India*, (Delhi, 2000).

<sup>32</sup> Munshi, *Jaya Somanath*, p. 114.

fort. They spread out in various directions and finally entered the courtyard of the temple. From my little peep-hole, I saw that they beheld the still burning fire, and the corpses of the six hundred brave women. The sight was gruesome enough to unnerve the toughest and they ran. But there were two who thought that enough havoc had not been wrought they entered the temple itself and tore it down to shreds. They broke into pieces the image of Lord Shankar...<sup>33</sup>

The overall picture that is conveyed is of a supreme moral dignity and courage on the part of the Hindus. It needs, however, to be pointed out that such self-immolation was practiced only by certain high caste Hindus, notably the Rajputs, so that Munshi is valorising high caste rather than general Hindu practices here. This is a general feature of this narrative. It represents an attempt to correct the supposed failure of colonial historians and Muslim chroniclers alike to acknowledge the great courage that Hindus had displayed in the past.<sup>34</sup> For Munshi, India is a virile nation whose defining characteristics are: 'common memory of achievements, will to unity, and habitual urge to collective action.'<sup>35</sup> Consequently, *Jaya Somanath* is the story of a virile nation conveying a shared memory of the unity and the collective action of Indian/Hindu society clearly manifested in adverse situations. Although as we will see later, there are always members in society not necessarily willing to act in the same way, but these members are seen as disloyal or traitors like the resentful character of Shivarashi.

The final scene is the subjugation of the temple of Lord Somanath, in which Munshi depicts the Hindu defeat as resulting from the treachery of a jealous monk called Shivarashi, who wanted to usurp the place of Gurudev Gang Sarvagna as the head of the Pashupat sect that was in charge of the great temple. The suggestion is clear, had there not

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>34</sup> The idea of bravery had been elaborated by writers from a previous generation of Munshi's, for instance, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838-1894) referred to the notion of *bahubal* meaning physical strength and prowess that the author attributed to Bengali people. And this *bahubal* had supposedly been omitted deliberately in histories by Muslim authors. See on this topic Ranajit Guha, *An Indian historiography of India*.

<sup>35</sup> K.M. Munshi, *Warnings of History. Trends in Modern India*, (Bombay, 1955), p. 7.



been treason, the Hindus would not have been vanquished. Being such brave warriors, they would have certainly succeeded in defeating the Muslims. Their failure was not systemic, but contingent on the treachery of one turncoat. In this way, or *bahubal* as Bankimchandra called it, could still be acclaimed as the defining feature of Hindus in their glorious past.

Mahmud is shown as entering the temple and rejecting with contempt Shivarashi's attempt to buy him off:

Hammir [Mahmud] laughed uproaringly. "You *kafir*, Mohammed does not sell idols. He is an idol-breaker." With these words, he hit Shivarashi hard with the flat of his sword and entered the sanctum.<sup>36</sup>

Then:

His eyes fell upon Gurudev Gang Sarvagna. In Prabhas, sanctified by the sacrifice of thousands of brave Rajputs, in that magnificent temple which had survived for centuries, sat Gurudev, calmly carrying on worship of the Lord. The world may be destroyed, but for him there was only his Lord.<sup>37</sup>

The iconoclast ordered the priest to get out of his way, but he refused to move:

Hammir was in no mood for discussion. With one stroke of his sword, he severed Gurudev's head from his body.

Another stride, and Hammir entered the holy sanctum, took a deep breath and snatching a heavy mace from a soldier, turned it several times around his head and struck the Lord's image with all his might.

The image, worshipped by generations of devotees, was broken into three pieces.<sup>38</sup>

This scene is particularly meaningful; Gang Sarvagna stands for the real devotee, for a faithful observant of his religious creed, whereas Mahmud is his antithesis, his nemesis, that is to say, a cruel fanatic, an idol-breaker as he defines himself lines above. This way, *Jaya Somanath* tells the defensive story of the Hindu people in order to protect themselves

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<sup>36</sup> Munshi, *Jaya Somanath*, p. 290.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 291.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 292.

from the foreign invaders, the ones that have desecrated Hindu temples as their 'mission'. It is a story of Hindu resistance and opposition to Muslim hostility.

This way, both novels appeal seek to construct a glorious past. There is a hyperbolic approach to the Hindu past, a narrative exaggeration in depicting the splendor of an ancient civilization. And if grandeur is to be underlined in the Hindu past, by contrast, the tyranny and oppression at the hands of the Muslims is also exaggerated. Muslim rule is also depicted in a hyperbole of aggression and cruelty. Consequently, there is the acceptance of a supposed decadent situation of Hindu civilization of that period pointed out by western critique. However, the vanished magnificence of the Hindu past was considered to be destroyed by the repetitive occurrence of Muslim rules in India that in contemporary time wanted to regain power. In this way, Munshi depicts Muslims as constantly striving to assert themselves as a brutal and intolerant master-race.

In addition, if it is true that the British were also identified as oppressors, it is also true that their regime was gradually considered in different terms. Their economic strength, military organisation, and other qualities were seen as positive forces that required to be emulated and assimilated before India could regain its lost glory. Muslims, by contrast, were seen as backward and barbaric, and Islam was to be rejected in all its forms. Bound up in all this were colonial notions about an Islam that was in eternal conflict with those of other faiths. In the case of India, this was depicted as the chief fault-line of the past thousand or so years of its history. As Ranajit Guha has pointed out, Indian historiography of this period was not able to become autonomous because it had taken for granted the colonial premise about the unending opposition between Hindus and Muslims.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ranajit Guha, *An Indian historiography of India*.

In both *The Master of Gujarat* and *Jaya Somanath*, Munshi goes beyond scholarly history-writing to present a more vivid picture of the glorious past of the Indian/Hindu nation that might appeal to a much wider readership. The qualifications seen in his political and historical writings are no longer present – he is able to narrate a tale of a past in which his Hindu heroes are virtuous and brave, while the Muslim invaders are seen as iconoclastic, fanatical and brutal. In this, he sent out a political message that resonated strongly with a high caste Gujarati readership. By the time of his death in 1971, Munshi was considered by many in his home region to be the greatest of all modern Gujarati writers, and he continues to be revered there in such terms to this day. In this way, he can be seen as perhaps the foremost ideologue for the Hindu right in its regional form in the state of Gujarat today.

## Conclusion

This work has explored the history of Hindu nationalist ideology in Gujarat and the role it has played in the formation of the notion of Gujarat and Gujarati identity, as well as its connection with a general conception of nationality. The frequently and often stridently voiced notion of Gujarati *asmita* (pride) has portrayed a regional Hindu consciousness that privileges Brahmanical forms of Hinduism, overlooking other non-canonical expressions of Hinduism. Thus, while Muslims are firmly excluded from such an identity, other sectors such as low castes, *dalits* (untouchables) and *adivasis* (tribals) are included in only a problematic manner that is full of tension. The research has sought to elucidate how this influential ideology evolved in its formative years (1880-1950), bringing out how its modern and very aggressive political manifestation has been built on foundations that stretch back well over a century. Contemporary riots, then, should not be observed in a 'presentist' perspective, since the existence of communal politics and hostilities in the state has, indeed, shaped the relationships between communities and the political culture in Gujarat over a long time period.

The thesis has also sought to show how this Hindu ideology embodied a broad spectrum of expressions that varied according to its different advocates. In ideal-type constructions, Hindu nationalism has been described in a monolithic fashion which is unhelpful in understanding the tensions within this way of thought. Historians have generally focused on particularly extreme figures such as V.D. Savarkar or B.S. Moonje as the most prominent proponents of Hindu nationalism, or at a collective level, the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh or the Hindu Mahasabha as the Hindu right organisations *par excellence*.

By contrast, the Congress had tended to be considered as a secular organisation – the promoter of an anti-colonial nationalism. While this is partially true it misses the point that

the Congress by trying to be an inclusive organisation had to make use of a religious language at different junctures in order to accommodate those forces which were apparently alien to its own principles and which were, indeed, contested at other moments. This led to a strong belief among many Muslims that the Congress was above all a promoter of a Hindu *raj*. Therefore, highlighting the nuances of Hindu nationalism, an ideology which in addition, has demonstrated its mutability through time, was essential because there were no stark distinctions among the several nationalist ideologies contending during these years, they rather overlapped or shared some fundamental principles. In this context, the political culture of the time prevented the development of an effective secularist stance detached from a communalist vein. While the Congress claimed to navigate its way under a secularist flag, at a rhetorical level it frequently appealed for support using high-caste Hindu idioms and ways of thought. As Sudhir Chandra has observed, Indian nationalism 'is a split phenomenon, and the world in which it takes its birth is a world of fluid contrariety. It is a world that does not correspond to the neat binary sets of categories such as liberal/conservative, reformer/revivalist, secular/communal, nationalist/communalist, and so on...'.<sup>1</sup> A detailed study of the Congress party in Gujarat for this period is yet to be undertaken that considers the multifaceted feature of the Congress nationalist ideology and campaigns in their full complexity.

On the other hand, if this is the case for Hindu nationalism, Muslim nationalism possesses its own spectrum of opinions. This thesis has only referred to Muslim nationalism in Gujarat in passing, and it can only be done justice to in a parallel research project in which the focus is on this community. At present, Muslims are either denigrated in stereotyped and highly polarised ways by the Hindu right, or they are portrayed – from a secular nationalist point of view – as a minority group who have been the entirely wronged party in modern

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<sup>1</sup> Sudhir Chandra, *Dependence and Dissillusionment. Emergence of National Consciousness in Later Nineteenth Century India*, (Oxford University Press: 2011). p. xxiv.

Gujarat.<sup>2</sup> In this way, history becomes a narrative of victims and victimizers. What we have seen here, by contrast, is that both Hindus and Muslims have been culpable of intolerance to various degrees, with each constructing historical narratives that tend to exonerate their own community while vilifying the other. Such a historical consciousness is hardly conducive in building a more tolerant and inclusive society.

What we have tried to show in this thesis is that this polarisation was a product of a particular historical period. Previously, there was greater tolerance and respect for minority rights. The Gujarati literati of the end of the nineteenth century were certainly not obsessed with demonising Muslims in the process of defining Gujarat and outlining Gujarati-ness. It was also clear that the historical and literary imagination of this period undertook a self-critique as well since the regional intellectuals envisaged a Hindu civilization worthy of praise but also with vices that had to be overcome. Time has proved that there has been retrogression in this respect, with dominant Hindu organizations which have become more recalcitrant on issues of multiculturalism. The horrifying attacks on Muslims carried out throughout Gujarat in 2002 bring out just how many people have imbibed the message that Hindu nationalists have been preaching in the region for so long.

The Bharatiya Janata Party, which gained power in Gujarat in 1998 and which has won all subsequent state elections with landslide majorities, has exacerbated these social tensions. Their stay in power means that a conservative and exclusive ideology has had a fundamental influence in society, which in turn has added to their popularity and electoral power. They have made a significant contribution in perpetuating alienation and hostility

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<sup>2</sup> For instance, Makrand Mehta, a very well-known Gujarati historian has expressed how the historical coverage of Hindu nationalism has been acquiring a totalitarian dimension, omitting nuances within this ideology but also with an increasing tendency of looking at Muslims as mere victims and at some point, denying them their subjectivity as political actors. While their situation of vulnerability is undeniable so it is their own militancy and belligerence on the part of particular organisations to counter Hindu militancy that also created a convulsed atmosphere at different moments in the history of Gujarat. An important aspect when historicizing is to avoid producing histories of victims and villains no matter who plays what role. Conversation with Makrand Mehta, February 2011.

between religious communities. The participation of the state government in the events of 2002 is well documented. But the reply of Narendra Modi, Chief Minister of Gujarat, to his numerous critics then and now, shows a provocative attitude in his conviction of a legitimate retaliation on the part of Hindus. He justified the killings of Muslims arguing Hindus were seeking justice for the Godhra train burning. His perspective simplified these happening as a spontaneous Hindu reaction to Muslim hostilities.

In addition, in his electoral rhetoric he has continually propagated a pejorative image of Muslims. He thus stated that ‘if he lost the battle of the ballot in Gujarat, there would be celebrations in Pakistan’.<sup>3</sup> His rhetoric deals with the hypothetical extraterritorial loyalties of Muslims but he also elaborates the idea of their supposed multiplying or reproductive capacity. This latter aspect, according to him, would change their minority status into a majority one in the near future. Groups and individuals analysed in this research already justified defensive violence and also expressed a concern for the demography of the subcontinent. The parallelism is evident but it is not mere coincidence; it is the result of a long trajectory of communal politics that far from being eradicated has been reinforced at different junctures. Thus, Gujarat’s historical horizon seems uncertain while the political actors keep seeding divisive tactics.

The most alarming aspect is that groups spreading a communal ideology have increasingly found several routes to implant it more efficiently. Text books, for instance, have been a channel to reinforce a biased history of India at an earlier age. The educational policies dictated by BJP governments were intended to perpetuate a contentious history of

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<sup>3</sup> Dipankar Gupta, *Justice Before Reconciliation*, p. 24.

Gujarat dealing pejoratively with Muslim figures and episodes and by privileging Hindu aspects of history.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand groups that had traditionally had a good relation with Muslim sectors have also been co-opted and communalized. Thus dalits and adivasis have participated in the spiral of violence instigated by the activism of Hindu organisations and political parties. The Hindu right has propagated myths, stories and histories of origin that portray Muslims as antagonists to dalits and adivasis and as being responsible for their 'degraded' condition. The intent here is to incorporate the disadvantaged social sectors in confrontational strategies and politics. This project has had considerable success.<sup>5</sup>

Thus the politics of present day Gujarat has been built up on the premises of a Hindu nationalism that was formulated in the pre-independent period. The trajectory of this ideology has solidified with time and has become more pervasive. In this respect, communal politics has been highly effective as a successful political strategy that affects the daily lives of communities that feel an evident bitterness and alienation and try to keep distant from one another. This is clear when displaced victims of communal violence ask the government for new homes in localities that are clearly separated from those of the other community because there can no longer be a peaceful coexistence for them.<sup>6</sup>

This way, the research has aspired not only at being a contribution to the academic debate on the formation of national consciousness in Gujarat in a crucial period, but also to shed light on the way that violence today is underpinned by the circulation of stereotypes and argumentative formations which brand communities as threatening or fundamentalist. It is my

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<sup>4</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *The Clash Within, Democracy, religious violence and India's future*, (Cambridge Massachusetts: 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Badri Narayan, *Fascinating Hindutva. Saffron Politics and Dalit Mobilisation* (New Delhi: 2009), p. 156

<sup>6</sup> "Give us our new houses but keep us apart, Hindus, Muslims tell Ahmedabad civic body", *The Indian Express*, Ahmedabad, February 19th 2010, p.7.



hope that this history will help towards a better understanding of the internal nature of Hindu nationalism and its long-lasting effect on Indian society. How such longstanding representations may be opposed and transcended is a different matter – for it is not easy to shift such deeply entrenched prejudices. It is however a task that should be a priority in the political agenda.

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## **Interviews**

Arun Vaghela, Ahmedabad, February 2011.

Makrand Mehta, Ahmedabad, February 2011.